stralia's magazine of the performing arts June 1979 $1.50

# Theatre Australia

## HADDON END

TO GO BRISBANE

Melbourne's search for an audience
Adelaide's alternative company
Queensland's new director
The world of puppets

BERTOLT BRECHT IN AUSTRALIA


# NIMROD

**500 Elizabeth Street Surry Hills Sydney**
**Car Parking at Owners' Risk**

The national magazine of the performing arts

# Theatre Australia

June 1979 Volume 3 No.11

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# COMMENT

Australia actually caught on very quickly to the plays of Bertolt Brecht, with, as far as we can discover, the first production, *Senor Carrera's Rifles* being mounted by the New Theatre in 1939, well within the great man's lifetime. Unfortunately by and large the plays have remained in the smaller theatres and even then have hardly been taken up in any thorough going sense. This month, however, is relatively something of a Brecht bonanza and thus an excellent time to assess the production of his work in Australia.

Why should we be interested? Firstly of course, he is *the* modern master par excellence. A point even acknowledged in that unimpeachable reference work the *Bluffer's Guide to Theatre*. In its star system of categorisation one star means OK, two stars quite fashionable, three stars really important, copper bottomed cult name, and four stars Bertolt Brecht.

More seriously, Brecht's style of theatre should have much greater impact in this country. As the critic Harry Kippax pointed out some dozen years ago, epic theatre techniques are much more suitable to portraying something of the vast bleak Australian landscape than the naturalist use of three walls of hut, with the wilderness beyond only imagined.

Perhaps the main point of the famous Alienation Effect *(Verfremdungs effekt)* is its theatricality, of making the audience constantly aware that it is in a theatre, and beyond that to be critical. As such it is opposed to both romantic atmosphere building and naturalistic pedantry. It also can be linked with a whole tradition here which takes in everything from early indigenous melodramas to the works of such modern writers as Jack Hibberd, John Romeril, Roger Pulvers and Dorothy Hewett. It can even embrace, as Jim Sharman's recent production of *A Cheery Soul* showed, the work of Patrick White, and afford it an overall coherent style it might otherwise lack.

Despite all the hefty theorising, Brecht worked best at his most theatrical and especially when using songs — providing an almost contradictory harmony with the audience. Again, as Bob Ellis has pointed out, sixty per cent of the really successful dramas in Australia use music — a notable one being his own (with Michael Boddy) *The Legend of King O'Malley*.

The songs have proved their abiding power to enthrall in such recent productions as *Kold Komfort Kaffee* (Nimrod, Sydney and Adelaide), with Robyn Archer, the nearest thing to an expert performer of them, and John Gaden, *The Hypothetical End of Bertolt Brecht* with singer/actress Jan Freidl and her husband, Composer Martin Freidl (MTC Melbourne), and *Concerning Poor BB*, Beverley Blankenship's touring one woman show. The involvement of women with Brecht suddenly appears to be reaching trend proportions.

On a larger scale there has been a production of *Mahagony* at the AO and just last year at the MTC, Bruce Myles' acclaimed production of *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* also presented some years ago by Nimrod and put to air by the ABC.

Now twenty three years after Brecht's death there is something of a revival going on across the country. John Clark is directing *Caucasian Chalk Circle* for the World Theatre Season of the Sydney Theatre Company at the Opera House, Ken Horler is directing John Gaden in the title role of *Galileo*, *Happy End* (on our cover), actually disclaimed by Brecht though he certainly wrote the songs, is on at Twelfth Night in Brisbane. Roger Pulvers' play *Bertolt Brecht leaves Los Angeles* is being premiered at Hoopla and two of the world experts on Brecht are visiting Australia. They will each be producing works by or on Brecht for a series of rehearsed readings presented at Nimrod in conjunction with the Goethe Institute. John Willett is directing *Drums in the Night* and Martin Esslin the Guenter Grass play *The Plebeians Rehearse the Uprising*. We are proud to have articles by each of them in this issue.

It is to be hoped that this present momentum will not be lost and that not only will more Brecht plays be presented, and perhaps translated particularly into the Australian idiom as Willett has done with *Puntila*, but that more of the Brechtian approach be adopted with our own works to bring about a revitalisation of theatre production in this country.

## Congratulations to Richard Wherrett

We might have tipped John Bell for the job, but now have no reservations in wholeheartedly congratulating Richard Wherrett on his appointment as Artistic Director of the Sydney Theatre Company. The interim board is to be applauded for choosing someone who is now the only Australian at the helm of a state theatre company.

## Subscribe Now for New Playscripts from Currency/ Theatre Australia

*TA* is proud to announce a new partnership with Currency Press for the publishing of playscripts. These will be appearing in *Subscriber copies only* beginning in August. They will be printed and bound separately and will build up into a library of some of the most exciting new writing available. It represents approximately an extra ten dollars worth of publications each year to subscribers, so don't miss out. **SUBSCRIBE NOW.**

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Theatre Australia gratefully acknowledges the financial assistance of the Theatre Board of the Australia Council, the Literature Board of the Australia Council, the New South Wales Cultural Grants Advisory Council, the Arts Grants Advisory Committee of South Australia, the Queensland Cultural Activities Department, the Victorian Ministry of the Arts, The Western Australian Arts Council and the Assistance of the University of Newcastle.

**Manuscripts:**
Manuscripts and editorial correspondence should be forwarded to the editorial office, 80 Elizabeth Street, Mayfield, NSW 2304. Telephone (049) 67 4470.
Whilst every care is taken of manuscripts and visual material supplied for this magazine, the publishers and their agents accept no liability for loss or damage which may occur. Unsolicited manuscripts and visual material will not be returned unless accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope. Opinions expressed in signed articles are not necessarily those of the editors.

**Subscriptions:**
The subscription rate is $18.00 post free within Australia. Cheques should be made payable to Theatre Australia and posted to Theatre Publications Ltd., 80 Elizabeth Street, Mayfield, NSW 2304.

Theatre Australia is published by Theatre Publications Ltd., 80 Elizabeth Street, Mayfield, NSW 2304. Telephone (049) 67 4470. Distributed by subscription and through theatre foyers etc. by Theatre Publications Ltd., and to newsagents throughout Australia by Gordon and Gotch (A'asia) Ltd., Melbourne, Sydney. Wholly set up by Tell & Sell Promotions, printed in Australia by Leader Publishing House.



Registered for posting as a periodical–category B.

# "?" QUOTES & QUERIES "?"

Mary Hatre, Harry Scott and Steve Hamilton in *Happy End* by Weill and Brecht. Directed by John Milson. Photo. Eric Victor Perdraut.

## MOVING SPECTRUM FROM ABC

**TANYA HALESWORTH, Anchorman**

"What is art? A hackneyed question and I have no slick answer ... mumble mumble ... But one thing I know — for something to be art it must not leave you untouched — no one should emerge from exposure to art quite the same as they were before. And this is the whole point of *Sunday Spectrum* — to give a wealth of such exposure. Only the ABC could afford to be so different. This is not to denigrate its commercial counterparts but ABC television has access to beautiful television presentations of all art forms. You won't remain unmoved by the Robert Hughes documentary on the seventeeth century sculptor Bernini, you could not remain untouched by Herbert von Karajan conducting Beethoven's 5th Symphony or Brahms 1st, or Oscar Peterson's jazz piano. I'll show you a fascinating account of the building of Nova Jerusalem by hundreds of peasant farmers in North East Brazil — their sweat and toil built a replica of Old Jerusalem. We'll view the art of Norman Lindsay (he was born 100 years ago this year) and hear Phillip Adams' views on religion. There's dance, drama, film review with Dr Philip Bell and interviews with Australians of note about their personal taste in books and art.

Put together the best in the arts of music, painting, sculpture, drama, dance and the art of the documentary film and you have the feast that is *Sunday Spectrum* — 3.30 to 6 pm on ABC television. I'll be there, I hope a lot of people will. You might not like all my offerings but you won't be unmoved by them. *Sunday Spectrum* is an art experience."

## GOING BEYOND THE RATIONAL

**IAN WATSON, Artistic Director, Theatre of the Deaf**

"I've just taken the position over. I've been here about three weeks and I find it an immense challenge as I'm working in a unique area in Australia — and one relatively unique in the world. There is the National Theatre in the USA and one in France, and others in the world, but it is a relatively small field theatrically.

I find miming and gesture a challenge. The company has become professional this year — they've had five or six years as a theatre company — and it is finding its feet. I find their standards are very high and their rapport with children, students and adults is amazing.

They are such an exciting group of people to work with that one hopes they might become the basis of a national mime and gesture company. I'd like to see that develop, not to the exclusion of work in the schools and with the deaf, but as an adjunct to this. The rapport with which they relate to an audience and the way they demonstrate the words, dialogue, is not a necessary part of theatre! The stuff I'm doing is 99% to hearing people who can readily relate to it.

The possibilities and applications of this type of theatre may release us from the terrible bind of being caught with words — having to relate in a rational way through dialogue — theatre by doing this is limiting itself. People's rationale tends to stop at that. The beauty of mime and gesture is that people have not built a defensive wall against it as they have with speech, so mime and gesture have a broad spectrum as they go beyond the rational.

At present we are rehearsing *Actions Speak Louder Than Words* for senior high schools. It has, of course, no extended dialogue, just visual situations, it is for adults as well and is communication — the Theatre of the Deaf is expert in this field! There is no more international language than that of mime and gesture.

I've found very little change is needed in my directing methods, I've always worked in a visual way. I thought it might be a problem and wondered if I could manage, but now I feel so comfortable. Many of the ideas come from the company themselves, the theatre has three deaf actors and one who signs and the production manager also signs.

I'd like to continue working with the deaf community and in the schools, possibly to do a detailed visual workshop which could help with the development of verbal language in schoolchildren — and long term maybe to establish a national mime group — No one is more equipped and talented than the deaf in this area."

## CONSTANT SOURCE OF WORK FOR WRITERS

**BARBARA MANNING, Executive Director**

"Ken Kelso's play *The Whale The Biggest Thing That Ever Died*, commissioned by the Salamanca Theatre Company theatre in education team, with assistance from the Literature Board of the Australia Council, went on the road in mid March and by the end of April will have played in 26 isolated areas seldom visited by live theatre companies.

The show moves into four Tasmanian Museums in June, July and August and there will be at the centre of a related arts programme for both school students and adult museum visitors.

The Literature Board's assistance made it possible for Ken Kelso to work with the company through all stages of researching, writing and rehearsing the show, to see it playing in schools and re-write, trim and polish the show after running in.

There is very little Australian material available for theatre in education work. Companies commission plays when they can afford it and obviously not all of these will be good; devise their own shows, some of which may survive and go into the repertoire of other companies; or search out published texts from the UK, USA and Europe.

There is a rich, satisfying and constant source of work here for writers able to see past the commercial theatre to creating socially relevant alternative theatre, which is what theatre in education is about."

## CONTINUITY FOR DRAMA

**MAX WEARING, Chairman, Australian Drama Festival**

"We're running the Australian Drama Festival to celebrate the emergence of indigenous Australian drama and to foster its development, and because we want to emphasise the continuities in our drama tradition.

You see we tend to suffer from cultural amnesia and one of the things this festival can do is to draw attention to events of the historical past by encouraging the presentation of Australian plays of the past, by arranging public talks and discussions on Australian drama traditions and by celebrating important anniversaries — for instance 1979 is the 150th

anniversary of the first performance of a play about Australia written from first-hand experience It is also the centenary of Louis Esson s birth

In Adelaide we can offer geographic continuity, a central location and overseas attention through the international festival of the arts This festival will also offer media and audience continuity It hopes to include presentations by every form of management, draw attention to both Australian drama in radio television and film and also the other more varied forms — musical vaudeville, puppet, pub, folk and street theatre

We also want to stress the importance of current and future Australian drama and given encouragement to suburban, and out of town try-outs and tours and to present drama reflecting aspects of life so far little seen such as women's drama and the ethnic Australian dramas

The rationale of the committee includes both formal and less formal events and funding from both the government and private sponsors

We are planning for the festival to run in Adelaide from Thursday 22 November to Monday 9 December, that is for 18 days "

## EVITA FOR AUS IN 1980

**KEVIN EARLE, AFI General Manager**

"How do I feel about it? — I m ecstatic! — We've been trying to secure the rights to this for the past eighteen months, as has everyone else, and we've got it The Adelaide Festival Trust has entered into an arrangement for an Australian *Evita* as a co-production with Robert Stigwood and Micheal Edgely The Trust will manage and mount the show Micheal Edgely will do the publicity and Hal Prince will direct Not all the details have been worked out yet as the contracts are being finalised in New York at the moment *Evita* will however, be here in 1980 "

## OZ FOR THE LAST LAUGH

**JOANIE SPAGONI, Alfonso and animal trainer**

Circus Oz is preparing for a 20 week winter season at the Last Laugh Theatre Restaurant We're rehearsing in a small gymnasium we've built ourselves in the basement of the Pram Factory We've always had trouble finding rehearsal spaces high enough for aerial rigging and human pyramids — this one is just right.

The show will be the biggest ever mounted at the Last Laugh Ten versatile performer musicians including two guitarists ex Stilleto the fabulously strong Alfonso Spagoni is risking life and hernias working his way up to carrying the weight of six people, the kangaroos are being taught to jump higher than ever with the aid of mechanical devices and the giant Queensland cane toad threatens a daily metamorphosis into the great peanut."

## LOYALTY TO THE CLUB

**SIMON CHILVERS, Director, MTC**

" This is my second production of *The Club* in a year I suppose I can claim to know the play pretty well and perhaps ideally one would like more time between productions However, it doesn't apply in this case. I can t imagine finding this script less than fascinating to work on There is a joy in watching the actors find their wings in it — it is an actors' play, thank God — with all Williamson's keen observation of character tied to a theme of loyalties Loyalty to the Club, to the game to one another — where men confront one another with the intensity of obsessive children, where the enemy is admired for the strength of his convictions, and above all, in which our involvement is heightened by the Williamson genius for humour

## DANCEFRONT

**HARRY HATHORNE, Co ordinator of Dance Studies, Kelvin Grove CAE.**

"**Dancefront** is a new non-profit making organization formed to build an audience for dance activity of all kinds and to encourage the presentation of new choreography in Queensland

It has been formed in Brisbane by the Ballet Theatre of Queensland the Australian Youth Ballet Company the Contemporary Dance Theatre The Grove Dance Ensemble The Queensland Ballet and Queensland Modern and Contemporary Dance Company

Its aims are to encourage new choreographers, both classical and modern and to bring dance programmes from interstate that might not otherwise be seen here

Most of the named dance groups have agreed to contribute at least one programme to the 1979 **Dancefront** series and negotiations are proceeding to include the interstate companies **Dance Exchange** and **The Dance Company** (NSW)

Normally performances will be at the Dance Studio at Kelvin Grove on the last Friday of every month, but the initial one will be on Friday 20th April as part of **Spectrum**, Kelvin Grove College s Festival of Arts This will be from The Grove Dance Ensemble and admission is free for members of **Dancefront.** Applications for membership should be made to Acting Secretary, Dancefront Physical Education Department Kelvin Grove College of Advanced Education Victoria Park Road Kelvin Grove, Qld. 4059 '

## WAGGA JUBILEE PLAYFEST

**JUNE DUNN, Organiser**

"The Wagga Wagga School of Arts will stage its 25th Festival of Plays this year and to highlight its importance in Australian theatre we are sponsoring a Silver Jubilee Playwriting Competition with Prize money of $1 000

This competition is designed to further the presentation of new Australian plays — an aspect which has been a feature of the Festival for many years Since the introduction of a special award for Australian plays several years ago we have seen many new and exciting plays performed at our Festival some written specially for this event

The Festival is to be held from 18th August It is undoubtedly an important part of the theatrical scene attracting people from Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra the Central West and our own region The Festival gave impetus to the theatrical careers of such people as Ross McGregor, now Artistic Director of the Hunter Valley Theatre Company, Peter Williams, "wonder boy" of Australian theatre at the present time, and Bruce Myles, Director of the Melbourne Theatre Company We have been assisted by adjudicators of the calibre of Robin Lovejoy, Malcolm Robertson Anne Godfrey Smith, Peter O'Shaughnessy, John V Trevor and Robert Levis

The Wagga Wagga Festival of Plays is justifiably proud of its achievements and we believe our Silver Jubilee Playwriting Competition is part of an ongoing endeavour to promote Australian plays for Australian audiences

Entries close on 13th June and the winning play will be chosen by an independent panel of professional writers We have already received numerous enquiries "

## WORKING ON ERROL FLYNN

**BRUCE MYLES, Director, MTC**

"Because of the current repertoire scheduling, I was free to organise a two week workshop of *Errol Flynn* to investigate the writing and content of the script and to find out if the play says what the writer intends One feature of the exercise was not having to cut short our discussions because of the pressure of an opening night deadline We brought Rob George over from Adelaide for the second week of the workshop and he now has several months before we go into rehearsals to think about suggestions that come out of the workshop "

## OH WHAT A LOVELY WAR MATE!

**COLIN GEORGE, Director**

"Joan Littlewood's famous musical entertainment — *Oh What a Lovely War* — is to receive a distictly Australian flavour and title — *Oh What A Lovely War Mate!* The production whilst retaining material and the spirit of its famous fore-runner, will incorporate more Australian incidents from Gallipoli to the Somme and songs of the period

This new version will open Season II at the playhouse, and play from 10 August — 8 September

Continued on page 31

Ray Stanley's

# WHISPERS RUMOURS & FACTS

It's a puzzlement. At the end of its Sydney season *Dracula* was in the red to the sum of $146 000, yet the show went on to do turnaway business in both Adelaide and Melbourne, taking a record $96,000 in the last week in the latter, where it could have run much longer but for prior commitments at the Comedy. But *Crown Matrimonial* and *Bedroom Farce* which have both done fantastic business in other cities, were gigantic flops in Melbourne! All three attractions had around the same good local reviews and each production seemed to me of about equal standard. So — has anyone got an explanation?

And talking of *Dracula* it might almost qualify as *the* exception of an American play which flopped in London and didn't do likewise in Australia. However, in the first place it was an English play although the Americanised production was copied both in London and here.

Will it be a case of the Sydney Theatre Company's gain being the loss of the Old Vic Company (until recently the Prospect Theatre Company) — or will someone other than Toby Robertson get the job of artistic director?

They say the thirty week tour of the Philippe Genty Company, which opens at Adelaide's Playhouse June 25, will be the most extensive and ambitious yet organised by the Adelaide Festival Centre Trust. Also it's only the second time that an Adelaide Festival of Arts attraction has been brought back for a follow up season, first being last June with English comic Chris Langham. And mention of Langham it's nice to have him back in his new show *Chris Langham Superman* another venture for Malcolm C Cooke and Associates and Haydon Price Attractions. The same team in August/September will be bringing out Lillian Gish in her one woman show *Lillian Gish and the Silent Movies*. There already seems to be big all round interest in the film veteran's visit.

With criticism so frequently levelled at scripting of Australian films, it's good to hear someone like Peter Kenna is taking a course in writing for films at the Australian Film & TV School. And I understand Alan Seymour will be writer in residence at the School August/October (with assistance from the Literature Board of the Arts Council). Also hear Bill Bain is coming for two months as executive producer of the TV director students, as from June 18.

The big theatre attraction looming up for 1980 is the Adelaide Festival Centre Trust's production of *Evita*. Already the burning question is who will play the lead? Robyn Archer, Pamela Gibbons, Julie Anthony or ? So *Canterbury Tales* has surfaced again in London. When he was staging *More Canterbury Tales* out here Martin Starkie told me he intended reviving the first edition, and then to alternate with the one Australia world premiered. Wonder if that's still his intention? Will be nice to have June Jago back on the Melbourne stage. And why doesn't someone bring back that talented designer Barry Kay. His designs for the Paris Opera last year were highly praised.

Now that he's brought that house in Honolulu, Michael Edgley will be able to spend some of his leisure hours watching sunsets. Terry Donovan has to be one of the most over worked actors in the country throughout June. Almost simultaneously he will be playing in the film *Breaker Morant*, on stage in Hoopla's *Miss Julie* and starring in the TV series *Cop Shop*. Understand Crawford Productions have bought out some of the performances of *Miss Julie* to relieve the load for Terry.

The State Theatre Company of South Australia's next season commencing August 10 looks nicely balanced. *Oh! What A Lovely War Mate* (which seems to be Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop entertainment written by Charles Chilton with new material by Nick Enright relating to Australia's involvement), *Twelfth Night*, *The Matchmaker* and two world premieres: Fred Willett's *Boggy Green Skin* and Ron Blair's *Last Day in Woolloomooloo*. The Victoria State Opera is planning a season of Strauss' *Electra* for late 1980, with a strong likelihood that for the first time it will be presenting an opera with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra.

It has turned full circle for Beverley Dunn and John Milson. The very first performance of Beverley's one woman show *As We Are* took place at the Hole in the Wall Theatre during the 1978 Perth Festival when John was the theatre's artistic director. Now he has moved on to Brisbane's Twelfth Night Theatre and has arranged for Beverley to present her show during the day time there from July 16 to 20. Wonder when Beverley's home city of Melbourne will see it? 3UZ's Peter Adams, producer of the *Bert Newton Show*, is spending two or three evenings a week directing a production of *HMS Pinafore* for the Leongatha Lyric Company. Journey there and back entails driving some 260 km so with Peter having a rise at 5 am every day, he must really like G&S!

These Broadway musicals and plays centred around show biz people continue to come along. *W C Fields on Broadway* is the title of a play written by the American comic's grandson, Ronald J Fields. There's a musical about Al Jolson to be called *Jolie* and another featuring the music of Harry Warren. Title? *Lullaby of Broadway*, of course! and at the Players' Theatre in London there has been the musical *The Story of Marie Lloyd*.

There's a new Jerry Herman-musical on the way to star Carol Channing and called *Mother of Burlesque* that old Kate Hepburn/Ginger Rogers film *Stage Door* (based on a play by George S Kaufman and Edna Ferber) is being turned into a musical. Edward Albee has written his own version of *Lolita* which he will also direct and *West Side Story* is to be revived on Broadway. Will this spark off another Australian production?

# LETTERS

Dear Sir,

Recently in Sydney a fellow writer asked me how I fared with State companies I said that so far I had a 100 percent failure rate, as the only script I had sent to a State company had disappeared. I added that another script had been returned to another writer after four and a half years.

My friend, who has an impressive track record, having won several important writing awards for radio and television, and some produced stage plays, said that the last he had submitted to a State company had been lost He had made some phone calls inquiring after his script, but the person he spoke to in the company was extremely off handed, almost offensive, questioning the writer's right to enquire after his script Eventually the script was found and returned looking as if it had been salvaged from the rubbish bin

After a few more horror stories we thought it would be a good idea for the AWG to start a dossier dealing with the way State companies ill treat writers Then, when the highly subsided State companies put up as the reason why they're not producing Australian scripts is the lack of them, we shall say, loudly and clearly, "That is not so. And here is why" And we shall quote chapter and verse. Then maybe the people in the State companies will either bestir themselves into doing what they're supposed to do, or else be violently tossed out into the real world

Maybe one day Australian companies will learn how to deal with submitted scripts In other countries, and in most film and TV companies, provided the script has been properly submitted, the writer will be thanked for the submission and very quickly told whether or not the script is to be bought, or if he is to be offered work Here the scripts seem to become supports for coffee pots, or even to go into the shredder and be lost forever Or is that they are retrieved from the shredder and produced, with the writers being blamed for the mess.

'Safebreakers and playwrights are akin, said George Kaufman "It is lonely and dangerous work with few rewards and everyone ready to say nasty things about you' Apart from the loneliness and danger — have you ever been attacked by an amok character? it is expensive Each copy of a script I send out represents $20 Ten scripts equals $200 Since they go out with stamped addressed envelopes you'd think they'd come home Some do It's an expensive way to make coffee mats

Some directors are good, and a joy to work with But when a bad one says, "It's a good script, I know I can fix it" — that's when the frustrated writer reaches for his Browning

Yours sincerely,
**M. Miller,**
**Elsternwick, Vic.**

Dear Sir,

I was duly chastened to read Kristin Green's account of her lecture at the Perth Writers' Week I thought that only in the State of Queensland would one not be permitted to laugh or take notes at a public lecture I am disturbed to learn from Ms Green that such restrictions apply to the whole of the Eastern States

Yours faithfully,
**Lloyd Davis,**
**Peppermint Grove, WA**

Dear Sir,

Thank you for Kristin Green's restorative article on Dorothy Hewett. One is reminded of the dialogue between Menelaus and Hecuba (about a wife who left him) in "The Trojan Woman"

M Silence, woman! She is nothing to me now Take her to the harbour and put her on the ship

H Not your ship, Menelaus Do not let her sail with you

M Why not?

H No man quite loses all his love

M That surely must depend upon the woman?

Best wishes,

**David Hough,**
**Swanbourne, WA.**

Continued on page 36.

SPOTLIGHT

# The Caviar Entrepreneur — Clifford Hocking

## Profiled by Raymond Stanley

Clifford Hocking who over the years has earned himself the reputation of being Australia's "caviar" entrepreneur, hates being interviewed In fact he probably can count on the fingers of one hand the times he has been "There s no reason to interview me", he says "I believe in promoting artists, not myself"

It is said that Hocking will not bring to Australia an artiste whom he would not be prepared to pay good money to see himself That he would not import an attraction which he personally did not like "No, I wouldn't, and haven't done", he freely admits 'I've been offered lots of things and really do have to be enthusiastic about the artistes or what they do Life is combustion anyway and sometimes they help the flames to burn a bit higher and that's what it's all about."

It was back in 1961 that Hocking presented his first attraction a group of Indian musicians who did a few concerts in Melbourne Sydney and Canberra Prior to that he had been in London and invited Barry Humphries back to tour a one man show in his homeland Humphries finally came in July 1962 and it was the first of several tours he made for Hocking

Hocking's company, Clifford Hocking Enterprises Pty Ltd, is located in a small suite of luxury offices in the MLC Building in Melbourne He operates with a small but extremely efficient staff co-director David Vigo tour co-ordinator and publicity wiz Judy Green, and executive secretary Judith Neale

Some of the people Hocking has brought to Australia (with several making return visits for him) have included Max Adrian with his one man Bernard Shaw programme, Frida Boccara, Hans Hotter, Ravi Shankar, Paco Pena, Leo Kottke, Stephane Grappelli, Pam Ayres and, more recently the Prospect Theatre Company — with three entertainments about Great English Eccentrics — and Blossom Dearie The latter will be returning for him later this year

Many of these artistes have been known to the majority of Australians their records collected by connoisseurs only, although afterwards the visits have led to a steady release of the artiste's records

"There is always an element of risk", admits Hocking "I certainly didn't bring out Indian musicians to pave my way to fame and fortune, because everyone thought they were from Outer Space in 1961, and even in the mid 60's when I toured them again But I did have a great interest in the music and a great admiration of the people"

Clifford Hocking with Pam Ayres

Perhaps Hocking's greatest coup was in bringing Cleo Laine to this country

"Cleo was someone I know from gramophone records and, when asked to go and hear her give a concert I said I didn't have to confirm my feelings about her But when I announced her tour and she came here, it was a little bit daunting, because everyone of course knew John Dankworth's name, but very few people know Cleo s name and they said 'But who is this? We know John Dankworth, but who is this Cleo Laine? '

I can recall Cleo Laine's first concert in Melbourne — when the Dallas Brookes Hall was about a third full Hocking found he could not even give the tickets away to friends Then, after that first concert, word of mouth got around and eventually an extra concert had to be staged — at the Melbourne Town Hall, which resulted in the release of a double LP of the concert.

"It just shows that Australian audiences aren t frightfully well informed in certain areas The world is full of very great performers who probably will never come here because word doesn't get through to the Australian public, either in the press or by way of record releases or TV performances"

It was almost the same with violinist Stephane Grappelli

"Stephane of course had a very long and distinguished career on gramophone records — after all, he started making them in 1934 — and there was an enormous public there, but it just had to be recognised For the first tour of Stephane Grappelli the same sort of people who came out for the first tour of Duke Ellington emerged — it was that sort of audience"

Although he has imported dance companies such as Antonio and his Spanish Dancers and the Balinese Dance troupe and orchestra, Hocking has not been so active in the field of straight theatre in the past This is partly because he felt they were well catered for by other managements

'Frankly it takes a lot to get me into a play There's a lot of theatre things that should come here though, and I'd be very interested in."

What for instance? "Well, performances of either the great classics or something very daring and extraordinary, something that sort of touches people up a bit. I believe people ought to go and be — not just massaged in their theatre seats or their concert hall seats — they should be ignited or touched somewhere That's the whole point of it all. And I really like to bring things I would like to see myself'

The granting of subsidies can be over done, in Hocking's opinion. "It takes away an element of competition, and sometimes anxiety, that tends to be necessary for something to be brought forth That doesn't always apply, but often there's a very comfortable thing set up round organisations that are well or heavily subsidised I don't like it very much myself That's not just sour grapes"

There have been only two or three attractions over the past ten years for which Hocking has received government support "One was the Balinese Dancers, which it suited the Council for

the Arts to support because it was a way of saving a great deal of money and not bringing another troupe from Indonesia that had been proposed — a sort of jamboree thing — that was going to cost them about $100,000 to bring in. I brought in the best Balinese dancers and the greatest orchestra from Bali, and it cost them about $25,000, and they had a great success — they were superb performers — and everyone was happy.

"To come back to the subsidy thing. I think it can quite easily be overdone. And the other thing that really irks me is these high powered committee gatherings. It costs about four and a half thousand dollars to have them meet somewhere and to decide not to give some poor struggling performer $750! I object to that whole structuring of the Council.

"There are some conscientious people there and they're all very enthusiastic and helpful, but there's also a great deal of empire building that's gone on. They also move so slowly that it's incredible, they're rheumatically slow. They do not respond to people. I don't think they understand sometimes the nature and elements of the business they're supposed to be subsidising. Sometimes opportunities arise and you've got to give a very quick answer and they say "write a letter", acknowledge it six weeks later and say they'll decided about it six months later. I just think that's a ludicrous way to work."

Clifford Hocking Enterprises have not applied for any grant for several years. On two occasions applications were turned down. Does Hocking feel then that the Council has knocked out the commercial theatre rather?

"Jean Battersby told me at one point that there was a sharp division of opinion on whether or not commercial theatre should be aided and I don't think they wanted to do it. I forget the details, but that was the drift that I got. And that annoyed me because they were so busy handing it out to a lot of unworthy amateur managements — totally inexperienced — which was a waste of money and just trying to appease and please so many different groups.

"I'm not interested in third rate performances, or even second rate performances of things. It should go to give us things in the theatre that we would not otherwise see, done by first class productions."

Hocking possesses some quite original ideas on how perhaps the Arts Council could assist the entertainment business. "I don't think that the press in Australia supports the theatre and musical world to the extent it could and should be supported. They tend to write copy on the basis of what they assess to be the interests of within the community. I think that you've got to give music and theatre space of all proportion to the actual interest in the community, and that's been borne out by the policies of several American newspapers, notably the *New York Times*, and maybe the *Washington Post* and *Chicago Tribune* and so on. You've got to do that to foster the interest within the community.

Continued on page 52

TWELFTH NIGHT Theatre Company (now the TN Co) has had a rough passage — Now JOHN MILSON has arrived from the Hole in Perth to get it back on its feet.

# TN — All set to take off

## Jeremy Ridgman

Readers of these pages are no doubt aware of the unhappy past of Twelfth Night Theatre. Over the past eighteen months, due paradoxically to its very struggle for survival, the Twelfth Night *Company* as such has ceased to exist in any tangible identifiable form. There has been the Twelfth Night theatre building, a hybrid edifice of dubious aesthetic merit (particularly on the inside); there has been the Twelfth Night trust, responsible to the government for keeping the said building 'viable' and there has been a motly crew of actors assembled on an ad hoc basis to present a season of boulevard hits in the hope of attracting audiences thereby eliciting governmental support. All in all it has been a cloudy and disputing affair.

Now, at last, a more auspicious star shines in the troubled firmament of Twelfth Night. John Milson arrives as artistic director after four and a half years at Perth's Hole in the Wall. Even before the first season opens (in mid May) he has already made his mark with two acclaimed guest productions, *Visions* at La Boite and *The Barber of Seville* for the Queensland Opera. Suddenly heralded by a publicity machine uncanny in its efficiency, there is a company (dickly dubbed the TN Company) and a tantalising season of plays ahead. New actors, new plays, new artistic director, new ideas — boasts the publicity and for once the enthusiasm does not ring quite so hollow.

Milson seems prepared to meet the challenge head on. To begin with, he is adamant that subsidy is not a right, that a company must prove that they deserve it; thus he eschews the commercialist option taken last year. His criteria for an alternative theatre are eclecticism and adaptability, being able simply to do the plays that the major state company is not doing at any particular moment, changing inversely with them but not attempting to compete.

The first season *Happy End*, *Travesties* and the Buzo/Hibberd *Sporting Double* indicates a preference understandable at this stage for audience pulling razzamatazz, but in general the seasons will reflect Milson's own eclectic approach and his favouring of what he calls 'new' writing, new meaning undiscovered or underproduced. In addition he is having a downstairs studio converted into a mini auditorium to house more risky underground material. (First up there is *Hancock's Last Half Hour*.)

John Milson, Artistic Director TN Company

As this piece would seem to suggest, Milson envisages TN as a contemporary commedia, hence perhaps his refreshing view of audiences as 'committed theatregoers' (a mystery from the 'blue rinse and hoon' image falsely perpetrated by last year's policy).

Another *bete noir* of Queensland theatre, but Milson seems prepared to tackle is that of the employment or lack of it of local actors. Many a star, not an import graces the casts for the first season, just such a talented and adventurous group of actors living, trained or working locally, as should be a pleasure to see together.

Milson admits to getting on rather precariously with theatre committees believing that a policy should be the reflection of a single vision. I for one hope that whatever the constitution arrived at by the forthcoming Twelfth Night AGM, Milson will be allowed to let his vision materialise, for Twelfth Night's sake and for Brisbane's.

The QUEENSLAND LIGHT OPERA COMPANY is this month celebrating its 18th birthday which after enormous financial difficulties provides an excellent ...

# Example of Survival

## David K Wheatley

As an example of sheer survival in the face of financial difficulties the Queensland Light Opera Company provides an excellent example of what can be achieved with careful management of limited resources

This month (June) the company celebrates its 18th birthday It has been praised by both the Australian and Victorian opera companies as being the leading light operetta company in Australia and for the last four years, since it began using professinal singers in leading roles, has had no trouble getting top artists willing to appear with the amateur chorus

Much of this strength must be attributed to the company s founder David Macfarlane In 1962, he directed a first performance of *The Mikado* which included such outstanding Queenslanders as Donald Shanks Robin Donald, James Christiansen, Neville Wilke and Henry Howell

Director of Music at the Church of England Grammar School an experienced conductor a member of the Queensland Performing Arts Trust the Twelfth Night Building Trust, the state committee of The Australian Opera, and a Director of the Queensland Theatre Orchestra David Macfarlane has long been recognised as one of the major identities of the Queensland theatre scene

In April, the QLOC spent $170,000 to stage a lavish revival of Harold Fraser Simpson s *The Maid of the Mountains* with June Bronhill in the title role supported by Terry McDermott, John Lidgerwood and John Aron The production was directed by Betty Pounder, with sets designed by Max Hurley Yet equal to the professionals in audience drawing power was the company's chorus — a forty-strong band of singers and dancers, enthusiastic polished and vocally sound "Our chorus has always been our mainstay — the feature we play up when we re advertising a show" says Merle Fassnidge the company's Executive Secretary It was the strength and dedication of this chorus that kept the company going in the early 1970's.

QLOC s 1979 production of *The Maid of the Mountains* John Lidgerwood with the chorus in "A Batchelor Gay"

After that first performance of *The Mikado* the company built rapidly during the 1960 s Then came a financial disaster in the form of the Offenbach operetta *La Belle Helene* in 1970 The audience stayed away in droves and the company was left with virtually no financial reserves

"What saved us was the fact that we'd just bought an old church which we'd converted to The Music Box Theatre", Merle said "It meant we had a home where we didn't have to pay rent So we restricted ourselves to working in this small theatre — it's licensed to seat 144 — and set out on a series of Gilbert and Sullivan We packed them in for 15 to 16 week seasons, Thursday to Saturday "

By 1973, the company had consolidated itself sufficiently to move its productions back to Her Majesty s Theatre when it now stages an operetta and a musical comedy each year "We have been asked to tour the company interstate" Merle said "In 1963, J C Williamson s asked us to tour our production of *The White Horse Inn* Since then we have had many requests to move outside Brisbane What prevents us is the fact that, for the members of our chorus, their participation in our productions must be considered second to their full time jobs From a practical point of view, touring just isn t possible "

Following *The Maid of the Mountains* the Queensland Light Opera Company will stage *The King and I* at Her Majesty's Theatre in October As well, plans are under way for a special season in 1982, when the company will celebrate its twenty first year of bringing light opera to Brisbane audiences

QLOC's 1976 production *The Mikado* Keith Redhead with the male chorus in "I've Got a Little List"

Important questions on the future of Melbourne theatre were asked at a recent seminar. TA reports

# Melbourne Search for an Audience

## Suzanne Spunner

More than one hundred people attended a seminar in late April at the Pram Factory on the future of theatre in Melbourne. Peter Oyston of the Victorian College of The Arts chaired and more than twenty local theatre groups were represented. The seminar was convened by the APG because they felt that there was an urgent need for an exchange of views between the people actually producing live theatre in Melbourne. The questions set for discussion were

— are we making the best of what we've got — what directions should we be taking?
— the continuing development of original Australian work: will it depend on the existence of lively small companies? or would one big company serve us better?
— the effective direction of state government funding for theatre: is it towards art or is it towards concrete? does Victoria need a policy on theatre?
access to the Ministry: is it adequate? do we need a lobby or association?
— the impact of the new venues at the Victorian Arts Centre on existing theatre companies

Of these questions the role of the Victorian Ministry loomed largest. Unfortunately for the purposes of effective discussion there were no Ministry representatives at the discussion although they were invited to attend. Similarly discussion foundered on the role of "one big company" as there were no official representatives of MTC, although there were people from the company present in a private capacity.

No formal papers were presented but Bill Garner of The APG and Vic Arnold of Actors Equity led the discussion. Garner stressed the necessity for theatre to pursue a culturally significant goal and Arnold outlined the constraints on employment opportunities for actors in Melbourne. Thereafter the discussion quickly centred on subsidies for theatre and the role of government in the provision of such assistance. Peter Green of the Footscray based group Seesaw Players was adamant that subsidy was neither a dirty word nor an apologia but an increasing fact of modern industrial life. "If the farmers of this country feel no shame in asking for subsidies why should we?"

John Romeril argued that the question came down to one of "cultural investment" and that such investment entailed a two-way account ability. He suggested that auditing procedures by funding bodies should encompass artistic and cultural criteria as well as the customary balance sheet surveillance.

The failure of the Victorian Ministry of the Arts to enter into the arena of public debate on the question of its artistic policies and the criteria it employs when granting subsidies, was deplored by many of the groups represented. These same groups expressed their frustration and powerlessness in the face of the sophisticated lobbying game which the current situation demands they play. Most people felt that there must be a better and fairer way to distribute the cultural dollar, and that the situation could only improve if the Ministry declared its hand. Until it does lobbying and its attendant inequities will be the standard fare. Given that the theatrical gateau is limited, the size of the slice should not depend upon who dined with whom.

The twenty two groups represented outlined their own artistic policies. These ranged from John Prinder of The Last Laugh and his outrageously successful "pragmatic, personal taste" criterion, to the expressly non-commercial community orientation of The Mill Theatre in Geelong and WEST in Essendon, from the repertory style programming of the 1812 group in Ferntree Gully who do 'one thriller, one comedy and so on' to La Mama's commitment to a writers' theatre. Groups involved in puppetry, clowning, theatre in education and childrens theatre also put forward their artistic policies.

Nevertheless two common themes emerged very strongly — a commitment to the continued presentation of a diversity of live performance and a disinterest in pursuing for its own sake the "excellence" credo. "Doing good plays well" — the most commonly touted subsidy criteria — was seen as an incidental rather than primary aim. As Robyn Laurie of The Australian Performing Group argued, in the current situation where the passive electronic media dominates "Live performance is in a beleagured and embattled position".

The meeting resolved to form a steering committee to approach the Ministry and argue the case for a better deal for subsidised theatre — in particular the standardisation of procedures employed by the Ministry in dealing with theatre groups. Further meetings are planned to explore these issues in greater detail. At the very least the meeting dispelled any idea that theatre groups in Melbourne are endemically insular or paranoid. "We are, whether actors, producers, writers or entrepreneurs, in search of an audience".

Continuing our occasional series on theatre companies in Adelaide, the city's other professional set up, THE STAGE COMPANY, is assessed.

# Adelaide's Alternative Company

## Bruce McKendry

A theatre company looking for an audience is rather like a woman on the make she s quick to invite you into her boudoir and display her wares The Stage Company, formed in June 1977 has a record of struggle and commitment Operating on a project basis whereby they receive grants for individual productions the Company grew out of a strong feeling within Adelaide of the need for an alternative option for actors and playwrights

Unlike the huge array of groups, troupes companies and ensembles The Stage Company began life as a "professional" Initially it grew from a group of practitioners pooling $100 shares in an enterprise to produce popular Australian Theatre Brian Debnam John Noble Rob George Geoff Pullen Ken Ross, Don Barker and Graham Caldwell form the Management Committee of a company they describe as a "changing ensemble" Brian Debnam, who has directed most of the plays to date coupled with John Noble, a core actor with the Company and also its administrator perform most of the day to day operational activities The interesting thing about the people who run this company is that they are all practical theatre people.

Access for writers in South Australia has not been easy, with the STC being obliged to fill a 600 seater they have not been in a position to produce local people s works Rob George (soon to be produced at the MTC) is the first Adelaide playwright to have his work produced on the Playhouse stage with *Grabbing It* some five years since the building has been in use The Stage Company have staged two of his works, they have a policy orientated to playwright participation Ken Ross another local has also had two plays produced and another possible on the way It is a company intent on local content with Adelaide and nationwide

In speaking to the directors three basic precepts motivated the inception and continuation of the Company the need to be professional that is paid equity rates a policy of doing mostly Australian plays and the flexibility to take risks Brian Debnam ex NIDA director s course ex Arts Council of South Australia and ex South Australian Theatre Company describes the Stage Company as "anti-cartel" and having "a total philosophy of change"

The Stage Company took to the boards on December 2nd 1977 with a Rob George play, *Errol Flynn s Great Big Adventure Book For Boys* in the Sheridan Theatre, home of the Adelaide Theatre Group During the 78 Festival of Arts they produced yet another Rob George play *Let s Twist Again*, people began to

The Stage Company in *No Room For Dreamers* Photo Trevor Thomas

realise the quality of performance and the bias to local works Continuing the policy of home grown and venturing into the contemporary political scene, the Stage Company undertook *The Right Man* a Ken Ross piece, which was directed by John Dick, who heroically had to go on due to the illness of one of his actors on opening night

In pursuit of the sought after script the Company next held a playreading financially subsidised by a fairly lucrative wine bottling The plays they read were *Run Run Away* by Robert Kimber, *Patio* by David Flanagan *Elegy for a Boy Musician* by Linda Aronsen and *The Swamp* by Rob George From this they took a change of course and in response to the Italian Festival mounted a production of Pino Bossi s *Windows* and Ken Ross' *In Search of Happiness* Due to open in the Arts Theatre, the venue swiftly shifted to the Union Theatre five days before the start owing to a fire in the Arts Not daunted the Stage Company put on the two plays to tiny audiences and critics praise The Stage Company had become an ensemble *In Search of Happiness* had a script which had been worked up in three weeks while rehearsals for the major work *Windows* were going on One notable addition to the company then was actor Ron Rodger, who since has lent to his roles a maturity and perception The venue was wrong, public relations were poor and yet somehow the Company had come of age

Because the Stage Company is and was a member of ACT, Association of Community Theatres their next production was able to take place in the Adelaide Festival Centre s Space rents being what they are Linda Aronsen's *Fall Guy* was directed by John Noble and was noted once again for the calibre of actors The continuing saga of financial strain forced upon the Company lapses of activity '79 opened with two one man shows *People Keep Giving Me Things* with Ron Rodger and *Lolly Day* performed by Graham Duckett, who has since taken the show to Melbourne Their latest production, *No Room For Dreamers* by George Hutchinson displayed a slick, well oiled body of actors realising a play that stretched their individual talents For the first time The Stage Company moved into the Balcony where they were met once more by critical praise, yet at times seats were decidedly unbummed So what's the problem? Time to establish a reputation continuity of productions associations with a particular theatre who knows, for the work the Company is doing has elements to suit a broad cross-section of audience

The Stage Company's type of play is one that explores form as well as content Already within Adelaide the Company has an identity, not political not the classic but modern Australian plays They produce the best plays that are available to them with the best actors they can get

With the competition running high for a subsidy to an alternative group in Adelaide the Company has been dealt a blow Applications did not receive the hoped for assistance in fact Troupe took out the stakes, but on an individual, project type funding the Stage Company are still able and hopefully will continue, to produce plays that are not forced into production by seasons or theatre commitments

The future holds another play in the Balcony, Mervyn Rutherford's *Departmental* (soon to appear in Currency/TA playscripts) with an all male cast of four Generally the Company works on a three week rehearsal basis and auditions are at present being held. Beyond that there is the possibility of Steve Spears' play *The Death of George Reeves* with a director coming from interstate, and an involvement with the Centre for Performing Arts which could be useful to both parties There are also plans to spread to the bush to gather an audience

It is difficult to invent a professional theatre company and keep it alive but Adelaide somehow supports a small body of people who can live on the smell of an oil rag exist in a world of fiction who are constantly pushed for time and whose life is theatre

A highly successful exhibition of puppets from all over the world and ages past has just been mounted at the Opera House

# The World of Puppets

## Richard Bradshaw

Yves Joly, the veteran French puppeteer whose company recently visited the Perth Festival, has an item in his show in which a young couple steal away for a naked dip. The couple is acted by a pair of hands appearing above a playboard and their clothes which they coyly remove from each other and fold into a neat pile are just what you would expect hands to wear — gloves. But once stripped, their nakedness is so absolute that you feel it is almost indiscreet to go on watching, almost impolite to continue looking at the puppeteer's naked hands.

One would be hard pressed to represent this item in an exhibition of puppetry. Two gloves would hardly invite a second glance, let alone a first and a photo of one hand taking a glove off another hand would be unlikely to recapture the slightly wanton moment of the young couple stripping.

On the other hand, a figure hanging in an exhibition might look full of a life and a character which it fails to achieve on stage. This may be because the puppeteer does not have the necessary skill or because the puppet itself is constructed in such a way that it cannot move as the puppeteer wishes.

In the puppet theatre it is possible to imagine a juggler's ball having more character than the juggler regardless of how plain the ball is or how beautifully made the juggler is. The ball would then be the better puppet but would hardly make compelling viewing in an exhibition of puppets.

A puppet is something which is used by someone in such a way that it appears to have a consciousness of its own. In the same way that costume and make up help in the human theatre, very often the way a puppet is made helps both puppeteer and viewer to establish a character. At an exhibition of puppets we can only judge the puppets by appearances and we all know the dangers in doing that.

I am reminded of a puppet in an English collection. Although it is a puppet of a cave man it is known as "the splendid gentleman" because every time the owner of the collection takes it out to use it responds so well he is forced to say "What a splendid puppet this is!"

Despite the note of caution that emerges in this preamble we have recklessly gone ahead and mounted an exhibition of puppets at the Exhibition Hall of the Sydney Opera House and I am delighted to be able to say it contains some "splendid" puppets and that it will give visitors a good overall impression of puppet theatre around the world and particularly in Australia. We have called it *The World of Puppets*.

This year, 1979, is a significant year in puppetry in that it marks the 50th anniversary of the international association of puppeteers UNIMA (L'Union International de la MAriionnette). The anniversary has already been commemorated with ceremonies in Paris, Liege and Prague, the founding cities, and is being celebrated with puppetry festivals throughout the world. The first of these festivals took place in Hobart, Tasmania, in the first week of January.

The King of Hearts from a production of *Alice in Wonderland* by the Pilgrim Puppet Theatre of Hawthorn, Melbourne

At a recent festival of puppetry in London the Secretary-General of UNIMA, Dr Henryk Jurkowsky [of Warsaw] claimed that UNIMA is the oldest international theatre association and that this is not surprising because, as itinerant performers, puppeteers would be the first to feel the need for world co-operation among artists.

The exhibition at the Opera House has been mounted by the Sydney Opera House Trust and the Marionette Theatre of Australia Ltd and special thanks are due to Bill Passmore, the designer and to Tim Gow of the MTA who assembled the material.

For us at the Marionette Theatre of Australia 1979 is also a significant year because it marks our first year of autonomy. This company grew from Peter Scriven's Tintonkies and has been nurtured by the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust from its founding in 1965 till now.

The idea for an exhibition grew in our storeroom at the Trust where a large number of puppets from productions of earlier years hang unseen by the public. Unfortunately the puppets of Peter Scriven's first productions were destroyed by fire in 1969. At the time his production of *The Explorers* was out on tour so puppets from that show are the oldest of the MTA's own puppets on exhibition.

From its tour of Asia in 1976 the company brought back puppets from Sri Lanka, India and Burma and these form the basis of our international collection.

We notified UNIMA centres around the world of our intention to mount an exhibition and posters, photos, slides etc were sent from many countries. The most remarkable response came from a man in Glebe, Sydney, whose uncle, a puppeteer in Mexico City, had given him two handsome glove puppets which he made especially for the exhibition.

Then we contacted individuals and groups in Australia and were overwhelmed by what was offering. In Sydney alone we had marionettes from Egypt, shadow puppets from Greece and some magnificent armoured figures made here, by Sicilian puppeteers in the traditional style.

Probably the oldest figures in the exhibition are the marionettes made over a century ago in the Penitentiary in Hull, England. They were brought to Launceston, Tasmania by the daughter of the governor of the jail and are representative of traditional marionettes in Victorian England, such as the dissecting skeleton and the chair balancer.

The oldest Australian puppets are two nicely carved marionettes of an old Australian couple made in 1936 by Kay and Alan Lewis for a show which appropriately enough centred around a tour of the world.

Visitors to the exhibition are generally struck by the variety of puppet forms, especially the more recent departures from the traditional categories of marionette, shadow puppet, rod-puppet and glove puppet. The range of sizes is also striking with figures ranging from the delicate, fine featured hand puppet from Fukien, China to the large schoolteacher from *Poppy* and one of the large figures from *Momma's Little Horror Show*.

When this exhibition ends a smaller one will be prepared to tour factories under the auspices of the Trades and Labor Council.

Meanwhile there is a pressing need for a permanent home for the Marionette Theatre of Australia, a place where we can perform to small audiences and also put the puppets, posters, photos etc. in our collection on permanent view.

# BERTOLT BRECHT
## PRODUCTION IN AUSTRALIA

### INTRODUCED BY WAL CHERRY

I am tempted to start a rumour that I have evidence to suggest that Brecht was once in Australia, having come here on an American troop ship during the war and, indeed, served for a time as a member of the politics department at an Australian University. For such is the power of rumour in the Australian theatre that it would be bound to be mentioned as a possibility in somebody's weekly column. The fact is that Brecht was never in Australia in body and seldom in spirit.

The problem is twofold: theatre people are seldom over concerned with the quality of the translation of a foreign dramatist into English. Most of the time it is enough that the play in English should have enough in common with the local theatre to make it potentially entertaining or, on the other hand, that it should teach some grim moral lesson or take up some obvious political stance. There has been an almost shameful abdication from first principles in the work of Brecht. Any old translation, adaptation, will do and any old shoddy staging can be justified in terms of something called "Brecht's theories", Brecht's theories are something else again. The poor man, to most of us, is a walking generalisation, either to be used as a weapon by the alternative theatre to beat the bourgeoisie about the head or to be adapted by the established theatre to demonstrate amongst other things that Brecht really was not a Marxist after all.

This is not to say that there have been no excellent productions of Brecht in Australia. It is to say that Brecht has not been as well served as he might have been given that the Australian theatre is notorious, so I am told, for characteristics which would seem to be of enormous advantage 1 a sense of humour coupled with sardonic incredulity; 2. a colourful sense of language and a splendid accent which can be used either to point up class barriers or to cross them; 3 a relatively high level of subsidisation, which should allow even the most established non commercial theatres to make experiments in performance/audience relationships, 4. a strong sense of the grotesque; 5 a strong sense of place and of the significance of names and landscape, and 6. a sense of injustice

Listed below are as many Brecht productions in Australia the editors could discover from various sources and with a lot of help from friends, Wal Cherry, George Whaley, Ralph Wilson, Collin O'Brien and Maggie Day to name just some. Given our communal inability to keep records this list is not exhaustive; readers are therefore invited to write in with any further information for a later update.

## ACT

1970 *Mahagonny* Director Ralph Wilson Canberra Experimental Theatre
1971 *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* Director, Laurence Hayes Canberra Rep
1973 *Exception and the Rule* Director, Ralph Wilson Canberra Evening College
1974 *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* Director Ralph Wilson Canberra Evening College
1976 *Man and Man* (a version of *Herr Puntilla*) Director, Ralph Wilson Australian Theatre Workshop

## NSW

1939 *Senora Carrera's Rifles* New Theatre
1941 *The Informer* (a segment from *The Life and Death of the Master Race*) Director, Jerold Wells New Theatre
1961 *Galileo* Director, Doris Fitton Independent
1964 *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* Director, Richard Campion Old Tote
1966 *Mother Courage* Director Eddie Allison New Theatre
1970 *Herr Puntilla and his man Matti* Director, Oliver Frala. New Theatre
1971 *Trumpets & Drums* Director Nolan Gandon New Theatre
1971 *The Resistable Rise of Arturo Ui* Director, Richard Wherrett
1972 *The Good Woman of Szechwan* Director John Bell
1973 *Threepenny Opera* Director Jim Sharman
1975 *Mahagonny* Director, Sam Besekow Australian Opera Company
1976 *Measures Taken* Suds
1977 *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* Director, David Cisek New Theatre
1977 *Never the Twain* (Brecht and Kipling) Australian Stage Company at the Recording Hall Opera House and Playhouse Canberra
1978 *Man is a Man* Director Ken Boucher SUDS
1978 *The Exception and the Rule* Director, Prof Wolfgang von Stas University of NSW
1978 *The Good Woman of Szechwan* Director, George Whaley NIDA
1978 *Threepenny Opera* Director George Whaley NIDA
1978 *Mother Courage* Director, Aubrey Mellor NIDA/Jane St

## SA

approx
1964 *The Good Woman of Szechwan* Director, John Tasker State Theatre Co
1965 *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* — student production for a University Drama Festival
1966 *Mother Courage* Director, John Broome University Theatre Guild
1966 *Brecht on Brecht* Director, Wal Cherry
1967 *Galileo* Director, Wal Cherry Flinders University Drama Group
1974 *Seven Deadly Sins* Director, Wal Cherry for the opening of the Space at the Festival Theatre
1975 *Mahagonny* Director Chris Winzar New Opera at Theatre 62
1975 *The Threepenny Opera* New Opera at Playhouse '75
1976 *Never the Twain* (Brecht and Kipling) Director, Wal Cherry at Playhouse '76
1977 *Happy End* (Songs by Brecht) Director, Brian Debnam The Sheraton Group
1977 *The Threepenny Opera* Directors, John Willett and Wal Cherry for The State Opera Company
1978 *Private Life of the Master Race* Director, Wal Cherry Flinders UDC

## QLD

1971 *Measures Taken* Director, Bill Pepper Twelfth Night Theatre
1971 *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* Director, Bill Pepper Twelfth Night Theatre
1972 *Trumpets & Drums* Director Bill Pepper Twelfth Night Theatre
1977 *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* Director, Keith Hudson Brisbane Rep
1978 *The Good Person of Szechwan* Director, Fred Wessely Brisbane Rep

## VIC

1958 *The Threepenny Opera* Director, Wal Cherry UTRC
1969 *Exception and the Rule* — with an electric band APG
1969 *The Elephant Calf* — as a joint production of La Mama and Melbourne University
1970 *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* Director, John Sumner MTC
1971 *Galileo* Director John Sumner MTC
1973 *Mother Courage* Director Joachim Tenschert MTC
1975 *The Mother* Director, Lindzee Smith and *The Elephant Calf* as a puppet show APG
1978 Reading of *Days of the Commune* Screening of *Mother Courage* by the Berliner Ensemble with John Willett present. An evening of readings and songs and readings of *Man is a Man* and *The Threepenny Opera* APG
1978 *The Resistable Rise of Arturo Ui* Director Bruce Myles MTC

## WA

approx
1962 *Good Woman of Szechwan* Director, Collin O'Brien
1966 *Mother Courage* Director, Jeanna Bradley — joint production of the Graduate Society and the University Dramatic Society for The Festival of Perth
1970-71 *Brecht on Brecht* Director, Arne Neeme The Octagon Theatre Company — including John Gaden and Arthur Dignam
1971 *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* Director, Ray Omodei Scarborough High School Production
1972 *The Threepenny Opera* Director, Edgar Metcalfe in the Playhouse for the Festival of Perth
1975 *Man is a Man* Director, Arne Neeme at the Hayman WATF
*The Resistable Rise of Arturo Ui* (amateur production) Director Mary Gage The Darlington Players

## Coming up in 1979

*Happy End* Director, John Milson TN Company Brisbane
*The Caucasian Chalk Circle* Director, John Clark NIDA/Jane St at the Drama Theatre, Sydney Opera House
*Galileo* Director, Ken Horler Nimrod Sydney

One of the world's foremost authorities on Brecht writes on his translation of *Mr Puntila and his Man Matti* for the Australian Stage Company.

# The Transportation of Jack Punt

**Or how we brought the good news from Finland to Murray Bridge.**

## John Willett


The idea of making an Australian version of Brecht's play *Puntila* originated in my work for Wal Cherry on the Adelaide *Threepenny Opera* in 1975, when Robyn Archer played Jenny. I had loved *Puntila* ever since seeing it in Munich in 1949, and had never understood why it was not more successful in the English theatre; its story of a genially drunken but otherwise ruthlessly self-interested Finnish landowner seemed more relevant to our tradition than any other Brecht work. As I saw Norman Yemm developing his role as Tiger Brown in the *3PO* I realised that Puntila too should really be an Australian — a big farmer of a kind now largely defunct in Finland, as it happens — and that this would be the way to make him intelligible to English and Australians alike. Wal was delighted with the notion and I took it back to London in my head.

After editing the play for Random House I made my own translation which Methuen brought out in 1977. That was when Robyn Archer was over here performing in the National Theatre's Brecht songs and poetry programme in which I was also involved. She read the translation, and when I took her up to Liverpool for a splendid sub Jubilee event called the Hope Street Festival we spent our time in the train mapping out an Australian adaptation. *Mr Puntila and His Man Matti* blossomed into *Jack Punt Esquire and His Mate Matt* (with Matt the chauffeur as a part-aboriginal). Puntila's house, referred to by Brecht simply by the name of its owner, became Punt's Gums and was relocated somewhere northeast of Murray Bridge. The "Kummerlicher Mann" — literally a miserable undersized man — was reborn as The Whingeing Pom. The sauna turned into a galvanised iron pool, the forest Punt thinks of selling, into uranium rights. Instead of the Finnish patriotic songs of the original, which is impregnated with a deep yet ironic feeling for the landscape, Emma the purveyor of illegal booze recites "I love a sunburnt country", while Punt's servants intone the "Song of Australia".

I made a ten page scenario which I sent to the Brecht agents as well as to Wal. Everyone seemed pleased and it was agreed that the Australian Stage Company would try to produce the play on these lines in 1978. The actual wording of my translation wasn't changed, it was left to be assimilated on the spot, though Robyn thought that with luck only minor changes would be needed. I appended a note saying that in planning the transplant we had "gone for fairly precise locations and real place names.

*These are of course changeable if others would work better. Brecht was a 'name fetishist' and Australian placenames would have fascinated him. The Finnish ones he used were largely real.*

*The feeling for landscape has got to be real too. There is a sense of profound love of the unspoilt countryside which needs to be conveyed in Australian terms by both language and set. If it can be related to the contemporary interest in conservation questions so much the better. Drunk, Punt loves the Australian landscape. Sober, he sees good economic reasons to sell it.*

A 1978 production proved impracticable but I came out none the less to do as much preparatory work as possible, and today we have a script and a fairly detailed production scheme. This time the preliminary work was done by myself with Wal in Adelaide, where I was a guest of Flinders University and the Australia Council. We started in mid-June by making a careful analysis of the play (using my translation): what did each speech *do*? who did which, and with what, and to whom? We made detailed notes on the characters as we went, primarily for the actors' benefit, also a resume of each scene for my own use. But the really valuable thing to me was the fresh understanding which this brought and the greatly heightened appreciation of Brecht's achievement. For once, I realised, he observes the unities, yet at the same time his structure is epic episodic, and this combination is what makes the play unique. At the same time it is quasi-muscial, providing a number of duets for different combinations of three leading figures: Punt Matt, Punt Eva, Eva Matt — all of whom have roughly equal specific weight, so that Punt is *not* in fact dominant — while the four women form a separate quartet, interacting first with Punt then with Matt, but finally on their own. What distinguishes Punt from his equals is his switches from drunk to sober and back, and the pivotal points where he does this are crucial to the play.

I now rewrote the 'Finnish'' stories of scene 8, making them Australian instead (largely on the basis of Ian Turner's books and some early works on Tasmania). I eliminated the 'Kurgela' location of Brecht's scene 2, which can quite easily be set at Punt's Gums like the other domestic scenes, a gain in clarity as well as economy. I dropped all proposed references to Matt's aboriginal ancestry, which seemed too much of a complicating factor, and also eliminated the rather artificial character of O'Brien the "red ragger", Brecht's over-symbolic Red Surkkala whom he added as an afterthought. I wrote a new prologue explaining what we were doing to transport the story to an Australian setting, while trying at the same time to match Brecht's poetic vision of the landscape — 'A midnight sun above shift inland seas'' etc. — and also changed the epilogue where Matt finally shakes the dust of Punt's Gums off his feet. Using a xeroxed copy of the Methuen paperback I made a complete amended text, which I read (in my hopelessly English accent) to the Cherrys, Lorraine Archibald and Michael Morley on the evening of June 27th. It included the two scenes that are most often cut: the Hiring Fair and the open air pissing scene called "Nocturno", both of which seemed to us important to the play. The total reading time came to two and a quarter hours.

The dialogue passed muster: I made one or two amendments in conjunction with Michael, who had been following the German text, but the speech rhythms seemed generally right. Wal was somewhat taken aback to realise the importance of the four women, whose two big scenes (7 and 8) emerged as the tough core of the play, even though they drop out after that. I for my part was worried by the slowness of the opening scene, which I decided not to prune but to rewrite in more condensed form. Before handing the revised text over for typing Wal and I then made a hurried but highly enjoyable reconnaissance of the Murray Bridge — Tailem Bend area in order to get landscape and visual details clear in my mind. A lot of things slotted into place: the isolation the stony roads, the old brown houses with their verandahs, tanks and windpumps, the enormous views, the 'Trespassers Prosecuted' and "Poison 1008' signs it all fitted. But where was St Mary's Peak, which Robyn had thought would make a suitable mountain for the last scene, and where was Elwomple, which we had picked off the map as the home of the four women? There wasn't a hill to be seen, just rolling semi-desert with low ridges, and as for Elwomple, or the main road near Tailem Bend, it is just a poetic fantasy by some oil company cartographer, there is nothing on the ground. Luckily we could substitute Perponda, with its post office, its single track railway, its Lutheran church and its almost equally euphonius name. But the lack of a mountain called for stronger measures before any irrevocable geographic nonsense got typed. So Matt had to build Mount Kosciusko instead.

The crucial readings took place on July 8th, some ten days later. First Robyn arrived from Sydney and we checked the changes and discussed the songs. She devised a good tune for the main "Jack Punt Song" which introduces each scene (and for which I had written three extra verses), and decided to sing Emma's "Plum Song" in the style of her own mother singing over the washing up, for the offstage song at the end of the grand engagement scene she picked the beautiful "Banks of the Condamine", while we also tracked down the "Song of Australia" and bawled it with gusto in close harmony. Then Luciana Arrighi came, who will design the production if still near enough to supervise things. George Whaley couldn't make it, so we got David Brennan of the South Australian Opera to read Punt, a most intelligent actor, he had been our Macbeath in 1975. We roped in George Anderson, Michael Morley and Guthrie Worby of the Flinders staff, along with a number of drama students.

We laid in some plonk. I got out my watch. Finally I launched into the Prologue, Robyn sang the first verse of the 'Punt Song', and we were away.

Well, it worked. No dragging, hardly anything that jarred on the participants. But one major problem emerged: the play's references to poverty were felt to be inappropriate to Australia in the 1950s (the period we had chosen). And so, after a good deal of post-mortem discussion, we decided to go back to the idea of having Matt as a half-aboriginal, only without making any specific allusions in the text, it would be done by casting and production only. This in turn called for a shift of balance among the white labourers, who had been thought of as immigrants and other fringe members of society, and so I subsequently reintroduced Red O'Brien as a factor in the play, though without giving him any of Brecht's somewhat unsatisfactory lines. As at present envisaged, he speaks the prologue but there-after only makes silent appearances, eg passing through to the Gents at the Murray Bridge Hotel.

I doubt if much more can be done with the script before we have some actors. But by now the whole thing was so vivid in my mind that I wrote a fairly detailed scene-by-scene description of the play as the audience would see it, from first finding their seats to leaving via the foyer at the end. I made a chronology, a list of costumes and etceteras, a scheme for the arrangement of the music to hand on to Dominic Muldowney and a scene by scene summary of what was (a) essential and (b) desirable in the set. So there we are: it's ready to go. All we need is the right actors, the right money and some firm dates. Watch out, it may turn out an Australian classic. And Bertolt, please excuse the familiarity, but if you're listening I think you'll like it. And I'm sure you won't be sorry when it's a success.

Another of the world's foremost Brecht authorities MARTIN ESSLIN, once Head of Drama for the BBC, now Professor of Drama, Stanford, USA, will be in Australia to direct a rehearsed reading of *Plebeians* in June.

# GRASS vs BRECHT

## The Plebeians Rehearse the Uprising

## Martin Esslin

Author of *Brecht — A Choice of Evils* and the seminal *Theatre of the Absurd.*

*The Plebeians Rehearse the Uprising.* Richard Muench as The Boss in the Vienna Burgtheater, directed by Kurt Meisel. Photo: Pflaum.

Guenter Grass is almost unique among contemporary German writers and intellectuals: he does not flinch from becoming involved in day-to-day practical party politics and actively supports the West German Social Democratic Party. On the whole German writers and intellectuals prefer to keep themselves free from such commitments, to remain unsullied by the sordid compromises and half-truths of the market place of public affairs. There is much arrogance in this attitude as well as the heritage of German idealistic and romantic philosophy that placed the world of ideas so high above the mundane realities of life, the men devoted to ideas so infinitely remote from the common people that a tremendous gulf separated the two worlds.

Seen in historical perspective this seems one of the chief sources of the tragedy of the German people in the years of Hitler: the intellectual leaders of the nation felt they had to keep aloof from the ideological and political battle fought in the half-illiterate press and the streets, and when they realised that they should have condemned, or actively opposed the evil men who had taken over the country it was too late. Bertolt Brecht, the greatest playwright Germany produced in the twentieth century, was only too aware of this tragic failure of the intellectuals. When he returned to East Germany from his exile in the United States he specifically made this point in his play *The Tutor (Der Hofmeister)* in which he shows a young intellectual rather castrating himself than fall prey to seducing the daughter of his employer.

Brecht himself, as a dedicated Marxist and follower of Marx's precept that philosophy and philosophers were not there to think about the world only but also to take action to put it right, tried to do his bit, but even he never actually joined the Communist party and always insisted that as a playwright he could serve the cause best by writing plays.

When, on the 17 June 1953 the workers of Berlin, incensed by what amounted to a savage cut in wages (their production targets had been radically increased) rebelled against the East German communist regime, and when this spontaneous uprising spread to other parts of East Germany, Brecht's attitude was put to a severe test. After all, had he not proclaimed over and over again that the East German Communist state was run for the benefit of the workers by the workers, that social injustice had vanished in this new workers' paradise constructed on scientific principles that guaranteed the disappearance of exploitation and oppression? And had he not, also, again and again insisted that he believed in the experimental method, that only concrete facts, concrete results could justify any supposedly scientific theory? For a Marxist an event like a workers' uprising in a supposedly socialist state must be an event of stupendous importance for theoretically such an event would have to be impossible. Hence the theory must be flawed.

There is ample evidence that Brecht was deeply disturbed by the 17 June 1953. In a poem which has frequently been quoted he retorted to the East German government's pained pronouncement that the workers would have to make special efforts to regain the party's confidence:

> **Would it not be easier**
> **In that case for the government**
> **To dissolve the people**
> **And elect another?**

But that was written well after the event. During the uprising itself Brecht remained inactive. He addressed a brief note to the party which in its two first paragraphs criticised the government for having failed to understand the public mood, but then reaffirmed his loyalty in the third. The party cut the first two paragraphs

and published the last sentence as a "telegram" of support from the country's greatest and most famous writer Brecht is said to have been angry and distressed by this distortion of his message but he did not want to risk the future of his state supported theatre by too strong a protest and so he acquiesced

To judge from the elegiac mood of his last poems in the three remaining years of his life he died a chastened and disappointed man And there is even a possibility that the disillusionment of the 17 June 1953 hastened his death

When, ten years after Brecht died, Guenter Grass published a play on Brecht s attitude and reaction to that traumatic day, he caused a storm of protest and much heated debate For, in order to focus the issues raised by the historical events of that day, Grass had somewhat manipulated them, and, as some thought, very unfairly

One of Brecht s projects on which he had been working in his last years and which was left unfinished when he died in August 1956 had been a new adaptation of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*. And in *Coriolanus* a rebellion of the working people of Rome against the government forms a crucial episode What, Grass felt, if Brecht had actually been rehearsing that scene in his theatre, while outside in the streets, the real workers of 1953 had actually risen against their government who had treated them as harshly and as unjustly as that of the Roman patricians had treated its artisans and workers?

The attractiveness of this idea as a dramatic subject is self-evident it would bring out, most clearly, the contrast between art and reality, the make believe of the stage and the harsh immediacy of the street Moreover, in Brecht s adaptation — in contrast to Shakespeare's own text which makes the plebeians mean and coarse — the workmen and artisans of Rome are noble revolutionaries, true representatives of Marx s idealised proletariat they are rising against an arrogant government of haughty, selfish, militaristic aristocrats If the indignation and anger of the rebellious Roman mob was presented on the stage as justified and admirable, could the author of the play condemn the real revolutionaries outside in his own streets as greedy, stupid malcontents, egged on by hirelings of the wicked capitalists across the boundary in West Berlin (as the official East German propaganda did)?

It was an idea too good too tempting for Grass to resist, particularly as he regarded the gulf between art and reality in Germany s cultural tradition as one of its most tragic features, the one that needed most urgently to be brought out into the open

And so Grass embarked on the project The resulting play *The Plebeians Rehearse the Uprising* is characteristically subtitled "A German Tragedy"

Having introduced an admittedly invented unhistorical framework Grass could not call Brecht and the other participants in the events by their real names So the hero of the play, the artistic director of the theatre, its chief playwright and producer, is simply called "The Boss" (as the members of the Berliner Ensemble frequently called Brecht) and the hero's wife )Helene Weigel the actress who later after Brecht's death actually played the part with the Berliner Ensemble) appears in the cast list as 'Volumnia", Coriolanus mother Was this a legitimate, permissible way of going about it, asked the numerous critics of the play? And were the events that are actually described by the playwright authentic enough to justify so transparent a disguise of people who for the most part were still alive when the play was staged in West Germany (notably Helene Weigel herself)?

These certainly are justifiable questions. Would Brecht's first instinct really have been to observe the events in the streets merely as an opportunity to get some authentic touches for the scenes in the theatre? And would he really have let down revolutionaries who actually and openly asked for his support?

No-one can answer such hypothetical questions, but most likely the answer to both of them would have been "no"

Yet, on the other hand, it can be argued — and has been argued by Grass himself — that the play should not be regarded as a documentary account of what a specific German artist and poet — ie Bertolt Brecht did on a specific occasion — ie the 17 June 1953 in Berlin but as a poetical parable of what could have happened and still might happen in the future in a situation when an artist, engaged in shaping a work of art on a certain topic, is confronted with that subject matter in the harsh reality of life itself That, Grass and his supporters maintain, is an immensely relevant subject in Germany — and no doubt elsewhere It touches on the sorest points of German history the German character the almost schizophrenic division between the realms of art and theory on the one hand, and poltical reality and practice on the other

In Hitler's time, for example, the works of the great German humanistic classics, Goethe and Schiller, who advocated ideals like non violence, human brotherhood, racial harmony and respect for each individual's liberty, were not only taught in schools and universities, performed in the theatres, but also openly extolled as national ideals by the Nazi leaders themselves while the same leaders slaughtered millions of innocent people in the name of racial hatred and a Herrenvolk idealogy which denied the brotherhood of man If challenged those leaders would have replied that political practice — the Germans call it *Realpolitik* — has simply nothing to do with abstract principles and ideals The men who killed millions in concentration camps went home and were moved to tears by Beethoven s *Fidelio* or Sarastro s hymn to brotherly love in Mozart's *Magic Flute*

That — in a brilliantly concise and graphic image — is the subject matter of Guenter Grass' play The fact that the idea for it came from the life of Brecht and the events of a certain historical day, Grass and his supporters would argue, is relatively unimportant The play would make its point even if one did not know that it referred to those events, and would probably make it even better And the time may well come when the events have been forgotten, and the play would still be relevant and meaningful

After all, many of the events dealt with by Shakespeare in his history plays are now known not to be historically authentic there are those who maintain that Richard III was a kind and courteous gentleman and that Sir John Falstaff was anything but a gross drunkard Yet these characters too make important dramatic and moral points for their audiences, regardless of their historical authenticity, because they have become universally valid archetypes for "the tyrant" the "kindly, rascally drunkard"

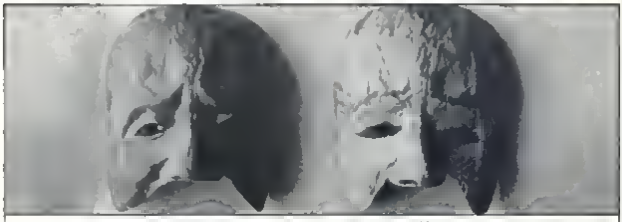
Grass may be no Shakespeare, though he is a brilliant playwright and one of the world s major novelists, but his character of The Boss can certainly also claim to be a tellingly profiled human archetype that of the artist of genius who adheres to political ideals while being too weak, vacillating and cowardly to live up to them in the stresses and deadly perilous situations of real life

# What is Brechtian — 1979?

## Roger Pulvers

**The truth has five sides ... like the Pentagon.**

(My) Bertolt Brecht



Brecht masks used in the production, by Solrun Hoaas

There should be no place for hero worship in theatre, and even less a place for it in the theatre of Bertolt Brecht

Brecht was a genius and he knew it "God cannot exist', he said as a very young man, "because otherwise I could not endure not being a god myself" That's all well and good for the man himself But for us looking back, assessing, and incorporating his theatre into ours the worst thing we can do—the most essentially un-Brechtian—is to treat him as any orthodoxy

"Brechtian', for me at least, is above all *irreverence* It is cynicism, jeering irony, debunking of the sacred and the accepted, poking fun at the blimps of power and poking one's nose into everybody's protected business

It may sound funny, but I think we, in Australia instinctively if at times unknowingly, understand Brecht Our sense of humor is based on irreverence In addition our view of ourselves is detached we don't take ourselves as seriously, for instance as the Americans do We can step out of our skin and assume an objective attitude toward ourselves If we fail to achieve this objectivity, it is because we are alt too soft on ourselves; in most of our theatre we celebrate our hypocrisy rather than drag it fully around the stage to expose it

The problem that I find most intriguing, though, is not what thematic content, in 1979, in Australia is Brechtian, but rather what theatrical invention can, today, capture the full effect of that theatre Simply, how to *present* a play and achieve that monumental irony and searching for the truly objective Plus one other main problem how to involve an audience emotionally, in a drama without calling upon them to empathise in the old fashioned kleenex in hand fashion Brechtian, to me, is a dryness of perception

First, how to present the play? The set "Brechtian" ways may not work anymore We are not living in Germany in the 1920's, nor even in the fifties In a particular device which Brecht himself used has been so successfully integrated into what is now considered the conventionally dramatic, it may have lost its effectiveness One should be irreverent about Brecht himself For me personally in *Bertolt Brecht Leaves Los Angeles*, it is basically an exploration into the use of masks that marks an attempt This use of masks comes not from Brecht but from my years in Japan The mask that does not cover but reveals, the mask that *allows* a character to be truthful, the mask that has, in its expression, every emotion that is present in the play, freeing the actor from false displays of emotion The actor can now assume an attitude toward his mask, and the audience's involvement comes from watching the actor use his skill to create, objectively, his character with it

The second point was one which Brecht himself, I believe, shied away from How to be highly emotional without the drippy involvement of high dramatics? In my play, if I may bring it up again, Pinkerton says of the character of Brecht there, "He hasn't allowed himself to become emotionally involved She (Butterfly) has evoked it in him " This is how I see the task That the audience should constantly be entertained yet feel detached enough to think un-emotionally about all aspects of the production Then before their very own eyes, they may find themselves moved, as the presentation asserts its own logic — not the logic of accepted sentimentality — on them The emotional response will be all the more deep because it will come as a result of independent thinking on their part Implicit trust in the imagination of the people in the audience is what I believe to be at the centre of any truly presentational theatre

But then, all these ideas are only my own personal emotional response to Brecht and may or may not work once on stage Taking the chance, over and over again is what makes it worth it Or, as Brecht the real man put it "It is always better to crap than to do nothing at all"

Roger Pulvers' new play, *Bertolt Brecht Leaves Los Angeles*, opened at Hoopla on 30 May, directed by Malcolm Robertson

# OPERA HOUSE — WORLD THEATRE SEASON
# CAUCASIAN CHALK CIRCLE

## Amanda Davies

The fourth play in the S T C World Theatre Season will be *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, presented by the NIDA/Jane St Company this company will combine professional actors in the main roles — headed by Peter Carroll and Elaine Hudson — with the supporting roles played by NIDA students

Written in 1943, while Brecht was in America *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* relates two stories Grusha, the servant girl who adopts the Governor's son during a palace revolution, and Azdak, the revolutionary who is set up as a judge Grusha and Azdak are two of the great acting roles in the modern repertoire This is Epic Theatre on a grand scale, with 117 speaking roles, and using music, song poetry and dance to deliver its message

*The Caucasian Chalk Circle* has not been presented professionally in Sydney since 1964, when the Old Tote performed it in the tin shed This production, directed by John Clark, with original music by Mervyn Drake, reflects an increasing awareness of Brecht s work by Sydney audiences

1978 saw three highly successful productions of Brecht s work at NIDA. The Jane St season opened with *Mother Courage and her Children* directed by Aubrey Mellor, which played to packed houses and received critical acclaim *Good Person of Szechwan* was performed by 2nd Year students in a private production The final 3rd Year production of 1978 was Brecht s *Threepenny Opera* in the NIDA Theatre of which H G Kippax said "this savage operetta comes sizzling off the NIDA stage"

NIDA/Jane St is proud to continue its association with Brecht s work, the *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* from July 4 to August 4 in the Drama Theatre Sydney Opera House

# A gap of ability

## THE ROOM

ROGER PULVERS

*The Room* by Harold Pinter. Fortune Theatre Company, Canberra Theatre Centre, ACT. Lunchtime season. Opened 9 April 1979. Director: John Parsley; Stage Manager: Anne Robinson; Costumes, Thelma White. Bert/Mr Hudd, Peter Bardsley; Rose/Mrs Hudd, Pat Hutchinson; Mr Kidd, John Caffe; Mr Sands, Paul Corcoran; Mrs Sands, Susan Kennedy; Riley, Tahadeese Kahsai.
*(Professional)*

"You're all deaf and dumb and blind, the lot of you. You're a bunch of cripples", is what the creepy old Mrs Hudd says in this play. And it may as well apply to many Pinter characters. *The Room* is cameo Pinter.

In this play we are presented with the interaction of independant monologues rather than dialogue. As such, the actors can't rely on the usual naturalistic cues that, in more orthodox drama, give them the signal to perform at a certain level or tone. It's not easy stuff for amateurs.

John Parsley's production was generally good. He himself had acted in *The Room* at the SATC in 1976. But I felt a large gap between the actors, a gap of ability. For the particular production this was unfortunate. But one of the functions of any new group is to recruit, and in the long run, it's a good thing to bring them on stage.

John Caffe is, I have no doubt, the best actor who has worked over the years in Canberra. He gets into every character he plays. In Mil Perrin's very interesting play, *The Flaw*, Caffe went from one mood to another. Here, as one of Pinter's down-and-outs, he comes on extremely strong.

The first moments of the play were perhaps the weakest. This is because the character of Bert, who just sits there and does not react, was not acting as if he were doing nothing. He was really doing nothing! There has to be an immense tension created in the air between the speech and the silence. It wasn't there.

Another problem with the production — and this was its main shortcoming — was the set. There was no sense of confined space on stage. A bureau was placed against a backdrop, and the entrance to the room was put off-stage. The room, which for the people there should have some sense of mystery, could not be *felt*. This could have been solved by putting some string around the space, on stage. The "visitors", then, could have entered the stage as if outside the room, then approached the space in front of our eyes. The door, of course, could be mimed. As it was, the idea that the room is a container of unknown identities, a place which has no place in relation to other rooms nearby, was virtually lost.

But the last ten minutes of the piece worked, and the message of Pinter's illogic came through. So did some of the wit. There was not enough build up to the single act of violence of the play — pushing the blind man off his chair. A bit more of an effort to dramatise the brutality of this act would have made the play's wit even blacker.

# Takes a long time to get going

## THE GOOD SOLDIER SCHWEIK

ANTHONY BARCLAY

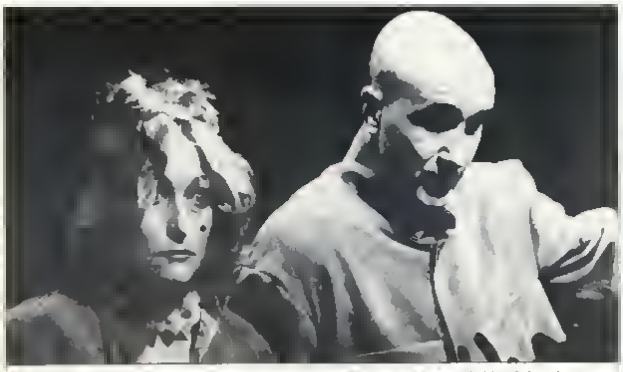
*The Good Soldier Schweik* by Jaroslav Hasek. Adapted by Ewan McColl. Q Theatre, Penrith, NSW. Opened 17th April. Director **Richard Brooks**. Designer **Leone Sharpe**. Musical Director **Judy Davis**; Stage Manager, **Libby Higgins**; Production Manager **John M Rogers**.
Schweik **Alan Brel**, with **Gae Anderson, Bill Conn, Trevor Connell, Judy Davis, Alexander Hay, Max Urland, Kevin Jackson**, And members of the Q Theatre Workshop
*(Pro Am)*

Jaroslav Hasek led a picaresque life and wrote an uncompleted picaresque novel, *The Good Soldier Schweik*, of which four out of six projected volumes were finished. Ewan McColl adapted the work to the stage for Joan Littleton's Theatre Workshop in the early fifties. Hasek's work is most definitely Eastern European in vision and mentality, incorporating as it does, a society vaguely medieval although contemporary enough, and a people at moments humane yet variously stupid and animalistic. Its sense of humour and irony are all too dry for Western affluence; the only counterpoint is working class humour and aptly enough McColl and Littlewood devoted so much theatre to the English working class.

It is no accident that two of the Q's artistic directors (Doreen Warburton and Arthur Dicks) were trained by Joan Littlewood. A more contemporary expression of *Schweik* would be Jerzy Kosinski's horrendously apocalyptic *The Painted Bird* but that deals with the Second World War not the First. Yet the disenchantment is there and both works pit the individual against an amorphous society. Indeed, in one sense, the more docile disenchantment of English working class writers like Sillitoe and Storey comes to mind and one can see what McColl had in mind in adapting *Schweik* for a very disenchanted English post-1950 society. But, finally, *Schweik* has a greater universality.

Richard Brooks' production works well but takes an awfully long time to get going. The first act missed completely but by act three some of the epic scale had been captured — particularly in the final scene of trench warfare. Similarly one gradually grasped the sense of great distance in the train scenes or with *Schweik's* solitary wanderings from village to village. In this he was greatly aided by Leone Sharpe's set: iron wire fencing that could be moved about to suggest an infinite variety of scenes against a timeless backdrop of sky and clouds that evoked many moods with lighting. One can never fail to be impressed by Sharpe's ingenuity of design in the fairly compact but small stage space of the Q and, if I'm not being too gossipy, she is to be congratulated on receiving an Australia Council travelling scholarship.

Alan Brel's *Schweik* is dominating and at moments, quite riveting. But the character showed insufficient development masked rather too much behind that goonish smile. Generally the acting was uneven. Alex Hay handled his eight parts with finesse, Gay Anderson and Judy Davis were similarly good. Kevin Jackson was a credible Lt Lukash. But there was a tendency to over act elsewhere and the presence of amateurs was too often jarring and uncertain. Not that the Q should be taken to task over this, the idea of allowing amateurs from the Workshop to fill the numerous small parts is very commendable, but it just didn't work.



Lynne McGrainger (Kati) and Alan Brel (Schweik) in the Q's *Good Soldier Schweik*.
Photo: Trevor Connell

# Typical farce — proverbial struggle

## TEN TIMES TABLE

MARLIS THIERSCH

*Ten Times Table* by Alan Ayckbourn. Marian Street Theatre, Killara, NSW. Opened 30 March, 1979. Director **Alastair Duncan**, Designer **Michael O Kane**; Lighting **Jonathan Calder**; Stage Manager **Frances Taylor**
Ray **Tom McCarthy**, Donald **Alan Tubin**, Helen **Judy Nunn**; Sophie **Penny Downie**; Eric **Alan Becker**; Audrey **Nat Nixon**, Lawrence **Raymond Duparc**; Tim **Philip Hibbins**; Phillipa **Elaine Maugan**; Korkov **Alex Knyazev**.
*(Professional)*

At the pleasant former Community Theatre under the gum trees on the northern side of the Sydney harbour, the audience laughs again and again at the jokes and funny lines and at the professionally polished and precisely timed delivery by a finely directed cast. This being another "well-made" comedy by Ayckbourn, they're also amused by the turns of the skillfully contrived plot which arranges for our entertainment an incongruous account of local politicking.

The play has by now already been replaced as the latest Ayckbourn success at London's Globe Theatre by *Joking Apart*, a somewhat wry comedy whose entire action takes place in an upper-class back garden and dramatises the facetious observation that some of us seem to be born luckier than others.

The *Ten Times Table* of a failed marxist revolution is set in a town hall which is used as a meeting room for a committee organising an impending pageant and the action shows the increasing polarisation of even small-town society.

Demonstrating a fine sense of theatre without which the greatest literary genius will fail as a playwright, Ayckbourn's plays are mostly light comedies and farces. Their more serious purpose shows in an oblique rather than obvious way, the meaning is not stated as content but lies in the form of the plays. In typical farce fashion the conflict is the proverbial struggle between the forces of conventional authority (the town's conservative element and the military power symbolised by the historical Earl of Dorset) and the forces of rebellion (the marxist school teacher representing the legendary radical workers).

In dramatic method Ayckbourn's technique resembles Scribe's 150 year old system of "well-made" play structuring. The protagonist, a likeable but helpless hero, is overwhelmed by adverse circumstances. Here he is dominated by the rival female force of the "bourgeois bitch" Helen. The first scene is entirely expository and much information is offered about characters and events which prepare the outcome of the

action and help the audience anticipate the final revelation, the fraud behind the eighteenth century legendary incident which motivates the pageant The action begins near the end of the first scene and progresses in the form of a battle of wits and of cunningly planned strategy between the two developing groups of contestants As usual, the hero is loved by two women, here a naive girl whom he courts and his de facto lady to whom he is obligated. A malicious Ayckbourn trick is the reversal of the "normal" situation the two girls relate to each other in the friendly avant-garde "groupy" manner, enabling the male to con them both into fetching and carrying for him

As the action begins the hero gains a victory over his opponents and his rival suffers a defeat The contest is a seesaw with first one side mastering the situation and then the other becoming more rapid and heated and productive of suspense as dominance shuttles from one side to the other After several such alternations an unexpected reversal of fortune shows the hero temporarily eliminated behind the piano In the obligatory scene the opposing side is even more humiliated suffering a crushing defeat when their female representative is kidnapped by the wildly inebriated second folk hero At the end only some comparatively minor matters need clearing up The hero's departure, followed by his de facto lady with her sewing basket, leaves the naive girl disillusioned about love going sadly off to feed the dogs Additional information eventually divulged by the deaf old lady pianist who also takes the minutes by lip reading and has done some research as instructed at the first committee meeting, shows the legend of the Penton Twelve to be spurious and the denouement thus reinstates the status quo, as is usual in farcical comedy

In its class consciousness and in the light but effective satire of middle-class peccadilloes this is a very English play The author fulfills his purpose of amusing the audience with an ingeniously constructed plot and entertaining characters, and through the ridicule of social and amatory foibles instructing us with healthy laughter The physical element of farce is present in the deafness of the councillor's mother, the slight speech defect of the de facto lady who can only communicate by inaudible whispers, and the permanently alcoholic haze of one of the committee members superbly visualised by Raymond Duparc Judy Nunn is delightfully bitchy in quick repartee, Alan Tobin presents a nice finnicky councillor and Alan Becher is a fine specimen of rough sex appeal

The design of the "barn of a hall" appeared perhaps a little too cosy on the small stage of the Marian Street Theatre but was certainly admirably functional for the incessant comings and goings demanded by the plot, which included a mysterious man haphazardly carrying a set of drums in and out

Sound and lighting effects nicely underscored and illuminated the always threatening darker side of the shenanigans The theme of this play reminded someone in the audience of David Williamson's *The Department* and another of *The Club*, where committee power wrangles also preceded an explosion of tempers Coming, as this reviewer did, straight from the last of too long a line of committee meetings of a voluntary arts body organising an annual theatre event, I particularly relished the jump from the real frying pan into the vicarious fire

# Unexpectedly invigorating

## GIMME SHELTER

REX CRAMPHORN

*Gimme Shelter* a trilogy by Barrie Keeffe Seymour Centre Downstairs Sydney NSW Opened April 1979 Director designer Neil Armfield Stage Manager Fiona Wynn, Lighting, Design Douglas Greeves
*Gem* Kev Michael Gow Gary Tim McKenzie Janet Maureen Green, Bill Bruce Cameron
*Gotcha*, Tom Peart Dennis Watkins Lynne Millar Kate Clarkson, Mr Walling Robert Jarman Kid Andrew Tighe
*Getaway* Kev Michael Gow Gary Tim McKenzie Janet Maureen Green Kid Andrew Tighe
*(Amateur)*

On the only night I could see *Gimme Shelter* in time to meet the publication deadline I was unfortunately late and was not admitted to the first of the plays which make up Barrie Keeffe's trilogy For this reason the interesting shape of the work — in which the two main characters are introduced in separate plays (Kev/Michael Gow in *Gem* and the Kid/Andrew Tighe in *Gotcha*) and then brought together in the third (*Getaway*) — could only be made clear to me in retrospective explanation However the ironies of the meeting between the parlour radical and the schoolboy revolutionary who has been crushed into line by the social system needed no explanation

As designed and directed by Neil Armfield the first and third plays are performed on the same set — Thorpe Bay Oval, nicely realized with a patch of turf a cricket screen picket fence and deck chairs — while the seating is moved during the intervals to fit the second play's separate set — a science stock room in a London comprehensive school I liked this use of the Seymour Downstairs space — an area which is slowly developing a good playing atmosphere

If it were not for the performance of English plays like this one might entirely forget, in Australia that theatre can still be seen as an effective medium for the exploration of contemporary social issues The plays are not great writing — being occasionally overstated, melodramatic and repetitive (I felt, particularly, that *Gotcha* was made up of a set of character cliches in a rather contrived situation, and that it revealed intellectual/theoretical intentions a little too clearly) And there was the same odd gap that I felt in Berkoff's *East* between the intellectual content and the neatly rethought version of conventional form But they are, nevertheless, thought provoking and in a way, the absence of vivid dramatic life leaves one's attention pleasantly free to speculate on the issues raised For instance, I found the headmaster's point of view rather attractively and sympathetically put in *Gotcha* and wondered whether I was being perversely simplistic or whether Keeffe intended it or whether Robert Jarman's performance was not bringing out an intended level of hypocrisy After all if a boy says he wants to be a brain surgeon what can you do but tell him to work hard? The practice of the education system (as demonstrated by the teachers) is clearly a villain in this play but is the theory equally under attack? Perhaps by implication, but the question seems to go beyond the play's terms of reference, especially as delimited by the headmaster's character

I thought the plays well directed and played I particularly liked Michael Gow Andrew Tighe and Maureen Green There was a crispness, energy and enthusiasm about the evening which was very enjoyable The only aspects which were, understandably, out of the range of the production were the age of some of the characters and their precise social differentiation as evidenced in accent — good work was done in the area of accent but it was of a blanket, general kind, spreading out from the Kid's working-class one These limitations contributed to the faintly two-dimensional quality of for example, the relationship between the two teachers which begins *Gotcha* On balance, I came away from *Gimme Shelter* feeling unexpectedly invigorated and cheerful

# Brilliant Theatricality

## THE SEA

ROBERT PAGE

*The Sea* by Edward Bond Nimrod Upstairs, Sydney NSW Opened 9 May 1979 Set design Larry Eastwood Designer Carol Needham, Lighting Design Graham Murray; Stage Manager Neil Simpson.
Willy Carson Andrew James, Evans, Basil Clarke Hatch, John Bell; Louise Rafi, Ruth Cracknell; Jessica Tilehouse, Maggie Dence Hollarcut Robert Van Mackelenberg Cartel, Alan Faulkner; Thomson John Sheerin, Rose Jones Julie Hodgetts; Mafanwy Price Lyn Collingwood, Jilly Debbie Baibe Vicar Robert Alexander
*(Professional)*

Bond's *The Sea* is almost as vast, restless and deep as the central image of its title That mass of water is the source of all life, and still its sustainer through rain It is mighty, adaptable, ever-changing and as Bond wrote himself "washes clean even when it destroys"

The play came after *Lear*, a modern tragedy similarly huge in its scope, and in many ways this is its companion comedy Like *The Tempest* it begins with a storm and shipwreck, there is a Ferdinand and Miranda in the surviving boy from the boat and the fiancee of the drowned man Hatch the draper is a mad Hitleresque version of Antonio Hollarcut his primitive henchman, a kind of Caliban and Evans is the sage old man who has isolated himself for years down on the shore this Prospero though, has been led astray by drink not the magic arts

The island is a tiny provincial community somewhere on the East coast of England, the time 1907 The community is a microcosm, a closed destructive hierarchy lorded over by the cruel selfishness of Mrs Rafi She is the employer of the dregs of the town who labour unmerciful hours on her estate, she is the customer whose "always right" fickleness pushes the shop-keeper Hatch's paranoia over the edge into violence and destruction

Many scenes have the vivid memorableness of tableaux Hatch wildly cutting up three yard lengths of precious velvet which Mrs Rafi no longer wants, the corpse of the dead man tangled in the pullover he was trying to take off as he drowned as the ironic background to the new stirrings of love in Rose and Willy, and the funeral scene high on a cliff absurdly decked out with piano and banner where the ashes become merely dust for Mrs Rafi to hurl into the eyes of her rivals

The central image of the sea itself is brilliantly given ever present realisation by designer Larry Eastwood A bare stage, allowing an Elizabethan whirling on from scene to scene, curls up at the back into five huge breakers bold, menacing — always on the point of engulfing the people before them

Hatch is the real victim the one who is drowned by this society For most of the play he appears to be the psychotic aggressor organising the town yobbos against the attack he believes is coming from the Martians. And here in is the brilliance of John Bell looking appropriately like Arturo Ui again, in the role, for he manages never to let this maniacal belief appear merely ludicrous The paranoia develops threatening Mrs Rafi with cloth shears, the crazy cutting of the velvet into lengths, and culminates in attacking the poor corpse on the beach with a dagger, mistaking it for the survivor of the ship wreck and a Martian His fears of aggressors are right off beam — it is not beings from outer space, but the capitalists and their trading system which threatens him

Mrs Rafi is the embodiment of that Her riches can sustain Hatch but they are really only a carrot leading him to destruction She herself is not simply the symbol and puppet master of a vicious society but its creation In one marvellous scene Ruth Cracknell allows the imperious mask to slip and reveals a lonely, aging character beneath, all too aware of the mantle she believes her status has forced her to wear Cracknell with her vast and varied experience, moves with consumate ease between the haughtiness, petty jealousy, self knowledge and outright farce that the role demands

Also deserving of special mention is Andrew James fresh out of NIDA and to my mind vastly improved from his performances there As young Willy Carson he shows us a growth into experience in the course of the play, at first burdened by the loss of his "perfect" friend, aware of his own inabilities, but finally rising above them in his love for Rose Maggie Dence as Mrs Rafi's rival, the beaten down but not always to be outdone Jessica Tilehouse, is a delight as always Her upstaging hymn singing on the cliff top is masterful Basil Clarke provides a serene, still centre to the play in the part of Evans, the old man by the sea

The play is a massive undertaking and one must congratulate Richard Wherrett on making

it clearer than the previous two productions I have seen in England He manages to keep the pace moving magnificently never allowing what is after all a comedy to get bogged in the depths of its themes, as many of the sonorous German productions have

And yet despite the obvious magnificence of it all one ends up with the disturbing feeling that it is rather a flawed masterpiece of a play Reams could be written on its brilliant theatricality good acting roles, its symbols, themes and language yet somehow on the pulse in the playhouse all its elements fail to bring off that gestalt, that sense of the whole being greater than the sum of the parts.. which Bond's playwright forefather, Shakespeare, manages with the ease of the true genius

# Summed up in a few poignant moments

## INDIANS

ADRIAN WINTLE

*Indians* by Arthur Kopit Riverina Trucking Company Theatre Wagga NSW Opened April 26 1979 Director **Damien Jameson** Design and lighting, **Stephen Amos**; Costumes **Ric Harley**

Buffalo Bill Cody **Sandy McCutcheon**; Sitting Bull **Ric Harley**, Senator Logan, **Laurie Evans**, Senator Dawes **Helen Reed** Senator Morgan **Pat Took**; John Grass **Peter Gray**, Spotted Tail **Sandra Baxter**; Grand Duke & President **Damian Jameson**; Geronimo **Steven Coupe** Wild Bill Hickok, **Warwick Peters**.

*(Professional/Amateur)*

Alternately brash, colourful, introspective and comical, Arthur Kopit's *Indians* proved an attractive choice for the Riverina Trucking Company's second production for 1979 under the inventive direction of Damien Jameson

Kopit's play is loosely based on a series of historical incidents that occurred during the legendary Buffalo Bill Cody's lifetime Re assessment of venerated figures from the past is an international pastime, and Kopit distributes his swag of historical happenings with the dexterity of Hazlitt's jugglers to create a pattern of contrasted episodes in a play reminiscent of Camus in its icily phrased protest

If Kopit is to be believed, Buffalo Bill is a tragic rather than heroic figure, a mercenary who crushed the Indian population and then ironically resurrected them in the context of "Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show" He is also depicted as an inadequate negotiator for Indians rights, a moral weakling and a hypocrite The play's forcefulness thus depends on the quality of acting invested in this haunted, powerful character Sandy McCutcheon did not quite succeed in making a convincing thing of Buffalo Bill's descent from arrogance to self justification While it would be overstating the case to assert that this production succeeded in spite of McCutcheon's initial lack of conviction, it was certainly true that his later.. muted scenes restored a sense of credibility in this non heroic character It seemed in fact almost as if McCutcheon was searching for an appropriate pyschological level as the action progressed, and that the early unconvincing Cody gradually assumed depth and stature

On the other hand, there was a magnetic quality about many of the supporting roles Ric Harley (Sitting Bull), Laurie Evans (Senator Logan), Peter Gray (John Grass) and Damien Jameson (Grand Duke) created vivid characterisations, especially the confrontation between Harley's monumentally dignified Indian chief and Evans' apoplectic senator a scene that crackled with tension The large cast on the whole moved with enough freedom to suggest abandon, and with enough discipline to avoid chaos, with the various cowboys and roustabouts contributing colour and swagger to proceedings

Damien Jameson's direction sought clarity and buoyancy as prime ingredients and he succeeded in enlivening the line of the story with imaginative devices the slow sarabande of mortally wounded buffalo worked well the horses and their riders pranced with equine friskiness and the Indian test of courage executed by five braves had a horrific quality

Inevitably, in process of manouevring a large number of players there were minor discrepancies in movement and particularly, in management of props during scene changes Again, the Indian group, in their uniformly neatly tailored capes, seemed to belie Sitting Bull's claims of his people's poverty But these were minor matters alongside Jameson's treatment of the play's final sequence with Buffalo Bill brought to his knees frontstage musing amidst a sorrowful chant by dispossessed Indians — a scene in short that summed up in a few poignant moments the whole senseless charade of butchery masquerading as liberation and of human dignity trampled underfoot

Steven Coupe (Chief Joseph) in RTC's *Indians*

Peter Whitford and Betty Ross in QTC's *Hedda Gabler*

# No soap opera saga

## HEDDA GABLER

ROBERT KINGHAM

Queensland Theatre Company SGIO Theatre Brisbane April 18 May 12.

To begin with the QTC's production of *Hedda Gabler* is good Surprising mainly because newspaper advertising features Hedda's line "In other words, I'm in your power Judge From now on you've got your hold over me .." — from which anyone could be forgiven for expecting yet another episode in the soap-opera saga "Love among the Fiords." Fortunately this is not the case

Alan Edwards' taut production spins a good yarn carefully and clearly delineated, marred only by a curious and distracting echo device over Judge Brack's final line, and an overly dominant ill-executed portrait of General Gabler This production rises easily above such trivia with Pat Bishop's unfussy, forthright Hedda, Alan Edwards unerring Judge Brack (Arthur Dignam withdrew from the role because of illness) a solid cast, and Peter Cooke's intelligent design.

Michael Meyer's translation places emphasis on the language of "class" This works well for Hedda and Brack and renders Tessman and his Auntie Ju ju (really) as suitably repulsive as caricatures out of *Biggles* As a result a lot of sympathy is given to Hedda This leaves Pat Bishop with no scope for cruelty while giving her the freedom to do what she likes to other characters and be forgiven This she does admirably

This Hedda is imprisoned in a fortress of formidable solidity — no flimsy Norwegian wood in Peter Cooke's design For once it is feasible that this is a former Prime Minister's residence and the absurdity of Tessman's purchase is thus quite clear Scant windows give glimpses of vast expanses of sea and sky through cross stays which effectively function as prison bars in Victor Ashetford's ingenious lighting design Bishop puts Hedda through all the obligatory pacing and wringing of hands — effective and acceptable because of Bishop herself and because Peter Cooke's design supports the productions view of Hedda's predicament

The moments of magic which make this production outstanding occur between Brack and Hedda Alan Edwards and Pat Bishop are both performers of exceptional skill and instinct and it's great to watch them sparring Special mention of Suzanne Roylance (Mrs Elvsted who is scheduled for six major roles with the TN Company's Season One) Her strong performance as Mrs Elvsted promises great things to come

Incidentally, box office indicates that the soap-opera advertising gimmick is working. While devotees of *Days of Our Lives* may not get what they expect from *Hedda Gabler*, they won't go home feeling cheated

# Staging problems not solved

## VISIONS

RICHARD FOTHERINGHAM

*Visions* by **Louis Nowra**. La Boite Theatre Brisbane Qld. Opened 19 April, 1979. Director **John Milson**. With Rod Wissler Jennifer Blocksidge Sally McKenzie
*(Pre/Am)*

Louis Nowra's *Visions* at La Boite continues that theatre's policy of bringing to Brisbane audiences the best new non-commercial plays from interstate It is also the first chance we've had to evaluate the work of the TN Company's new director John Milson, who has been busily exploring the local scene while he waits for his own company's year to begin He's brought a strong cast together for *Visions*, notably Sally McKenzie as the imperious Madame Lynch whose unlikely vision of a pseudo-European high culture in Paraguay dominates the play, and Jennifer Blocksidge as Juana, the blind and dumb peasant whose contrasting visions of imminent catastrophe are realised as the play progresses

President Lopez of Paraguay (the third visionary of the title) is less well handled by Rod Wissler An extraordinary physical actor (recall his Young Mo?), he is adept at providing with his body the expressive qualities his voice lacks In a role such as this he is crippled, and his El Presidente with his vision of a Paraguay uber alles is all too often a cardboard braggart without humour or intelligence

Nevertheless the two leading female performances sent me home moderately happy, and it was only after later cogitation that I conceded there were major flaws in both play and production The script makes extraordinary demands on any production by calling for on stage gunshots, gory deaths, hot and cold baths, lepers, leeches, a fight with rocks, a swamp and buckets of blood I appreciate the difficulties which led the actors to replace the real rocks they'd originally used with blood soaked sponge rubber imitations, but it's the first time I've seen an actor get blood out of a stone Here, and at other points (Lopez's death for example) it was impossible to suspend disbelief, and the production plunged to ridiculous depths

The play itself is partly to blame The rise and fall of Lopez and Lynch makes a good historical yarn, but it transfers awkwardly to dramatic form Scenes such as the one in which the assembled ladies view a sea battle from a clifftop are tortured exercises in giving information through dialogue By way of contrast the openly theatrical play within the play made that scene leap into life in a way that this kind of epic narrative can when it's liberated from the necessity for real rocks and pseudo-realistic dialogue Paraguay elsewhere was too much with us, and this made Juana's prophecies — that other dimension of the play that was central to his earlier *Inner Voices* — an odd appendage to a true life adventure story from *Parade*

John Milson's production failed in the perhaps impossible task of making this world concrete and believable but set and staging had other more fundamental flaws The play is staged on and around a central elevated platform which serves the text well enough in the first half as a setting for the palace and for soirees and dances, but it is totally out of place when Lopez and his defeated army retreat into the swamps Instead of dragging her crinoline in the mire, Madame Lopez remains on her platform with only a few holes in the decking symbolising the wreck of her vision And this production makes few concessions to staging in the round, the actors are positioned to face only half the seating blocks those in the others saw barely a face all night And while the pauses between scenes were less dreary than in the Sydney production the staging problems of epic construction were still not solved

All the more credit then to the acting, which in at least the two roles mentioned earlier managed to overcome all obstacles.

# Suggestive image of strange matters

## MACBETH

VERONICA KELLY

*Macbeth* by William Shakespeare. Brisbane Actors Company Twelfth Night Theatre, Brisbane, Qld. Opened 18 April 1979. Director: Jane Atkins. Stage Manager: Ken Tews. Movement: Eve Davey; Costuming: Theatre Enterprises.
Duncan: Les Evans, Malcolm: Michael McCaffrey; Seton: Peter Old man: Tony Brown Learnox: Bruce Parr Ross, Steve Hamilton Macbeth: David Clendinning; Banquo: Seward Alan Fadicott, Donalbain, Angus, Brian Cavanagh Lady Macbeth: Jennifer Flowers, Fleance: Lady Macduff: Gentlewoman: Kaye Stevenson; Macduff: Macauley Hamilton.
*(Professional)*

At midnight on 20 April, one hour after my viewing BAC's haunted and nocturnal *Macbeth* the once beautiful old Bellevue Hotel was torn down in a cynically overt display of utter contempt for political consensus and civic decency. The large crowd held back by a thick blue line, shouted curses and appeals, sobbed quietly or watched in dumb shame as Petersen's scab wreckers ripped into the vulnerable facade of the stately building. When, under the lurid to and fro sweep of spotlights, the first section of the building was dragged apart by a noose of steel cables, collapsing in a cloud of white dust, a tremor of mourning and rage swept the crowd. So must people feel at a public execution, soiled impotent with only pity to offer. By the next sunset the dirty act was completed. With barefaced power the Bellevue was swept from our sight.

It is appropriate yet difficult to compare political reality with great theatre, which at its finest offers an emblem of the complex dynamic of creative and evil impulses which shape the life of a community. Jane Atkin's *Macbeth* concentrates its statement on the exploration of the mental world of the power seeker. It is vital to attempt comprehension of the impulse to tyranny when the despot in question is Shakespeare's creation: inspection is invited of a mind which one can, at least, examine without excessive repulsion. In the scene with his faceless hired assassins David Clendinning's Macbeth revels in his newly-discovered manipulative skills playing the political intriguer like a virtuoso dringing himself with power lust. Again, in the Seyton and Doctor scene, he alternatively rants like Schickelgruber at his underlings ('Hang those that talk of reason!') and renders a histrionic version of the leader oppressed by superhuman responsibilities ('Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased?') such that true impulse and cunning expediency become impossible to distinguish. It is imperative and inevitable that this Macbeth be defeated yet at the end the witches hallucinatory lure echoes on, such that others even then can find in themselves a capacity for a furtive and fascinated response.

Jane Atkins has taken the play firmly in hand and presented no mere reverential reading but a committed and powerfully visualised interpretation. The dark cavernous stage of Twelfth Night Theatre is stripped to the back walls: torches flicker, fog and mist engulf the characters who restlessly pace from obscurity to brief pools of harsh diagonal coloured light, emerging and receding like spectres. The setting appears to represent principally the mind of Macbeth. Physicalisation is strongly expressionist, with scenes overlapping as though emerging from the characters' fears, desires and memories. No visible witches here, instead internalised electronically scrambled voices promise and deride.

As the focus is kept basically within the consciousness of the central character, the question of what response to his outrages the others choose to make assumes a secondary emphasis, yet the production's dominant mode of febrile subjectivity is also able to encompass this perspective. The Ross character changes sides, plays the apprentice but willing opportunist until he is repelled by Macbeth's megalomania, but at the end is himself receptive as Macduff perceives, to the witches' enticements. Experiencing *Macbeth* and the Bellevue demolition offers a weird juxtaposition. The two pieces of theatre even display disturbing visual similarities — bare structures shrouded in dust and stabbing light, furtive and desperate acts of destruction and fear filled hatred done in the night, Banquo assassinated, Lady Macduff betrayed. Yet while quotidian reality prompts one to the consideration that tyranny must as a moral duty be confronted and overthrown, BAC's *Macbeth* insists that evil and barren power lust are inevitable components of human potential: asocial, unstoppable. Reason is taken prisoner; triumphs are at best temporary, temporisers usually triumphant. With their bunker *Macbeth* BAC provides, not a distanced analysis of corruption but a suggestive image where men may read strange matters, and which looks like the time.

David Clendinning as the BAC's *Macbeth*

Daphne Gray (Bridget Madigan) in STC's *The Shaugraun* Photo David Wilson

# Had the patrons clapping and capering

## THE SHAUGRAUN

GUTHRIE WORBY

*The Shaugraun* by Dion Boucicault State Theatre Company Playhouse, Adelaide SA Opened 28 April 1979 Director Colin **George**, Designer **Axel Bartz**, Lighting **Nigel Levings**; Movement **Michael Fuller** Assistant **Kevin Planner**
Claire Folbot **Christine Mahoney** Mrs O'Kelly **Andine Leith**, Captain Molyneux **Neil Fitzpatrick**, Arte O'Neal **Katrina Foster**; Corry Kitchela **Leslie Dayman** Father Dolan **Robin Bowering**, Harvey Duff **Edwin Hodgeman** Robert Hollom **Peter Schwarz**; Moya **Nina Landis** Conn **Tony Strachan** Sergeant Smith **Andy Donovan** **Robert Grubb** Bridget Maddigan **Daphne Grey** Peasants etc **Michael Siberry** **Colin Freels**, **Wayne Jarrett**, **Tony Prehn** **Andrew Moura**, **John Saunders**, **Don Bell**, **Michael Habib**, **Delena Cannan**, **Daphne Harris**.
*(Professional)*

There was a time when Boucicault's 1875 Anglo-Irish melodrama had some clout There was theatrical daring in his choice of a Fenian hero and in an exposition which dealt with the substance of Irish rebellion against colonial repression, the vilification of collaborators and the celebration of a peasantry which was endowed with more wit and cunning when pickled than the sober military and civilian administration combined

Today the merest hint of such concerns barely impinges though the troubles themselves have far from faded Bereft of its bite *The Shaugraun* tells the simple story of lovers crossed, of betrayal and treachery, threatened virtue requital and lawful restitution — for some In its fairy tale way it shows the dispossessed by noble Irish squire class victimised by British law and deprived of British justice, restored to its rightful place a little below heaven and somewhere above the bog, by a faithful and resourceful reprobate and a moon struck chocolate-box Hussar

The occasional reference to Australia — as a penal colony — and the apparent sympathy harboured here for the exploits of certain Irish rascals — from the six Fenians who escaped from Fremantle aboard the Catalpa in 1876 to the Kelly's — gave the play a familiar feel, without bringing on the dyspepsia which accompanies our occasional scrutiny of the reality behind the myths of transportation and victimisation. That other figure of colonial comedy the Pom-out-of water, was also evident and appreciated

The production then was a well organised, orchestrated and executed theatrical lark, with a high form emphasis and a commendable uniformity of competence in execution The smooth even slick style of playing doubtless served the Boucicault method and intention well The tableaux were fluid and balletic, the spectacle convincingly yet economically achieved in Axel Bartz setting and the moral conventions of melodrama appropriately rendered in deftly drawn, even understated, characterisation at the golden heart of the play

If there was a weakness, it lay in a failure to pursue the representatives of absolute good and evil to their logical conclusion, especially at the evil end of the spectrum A couple of the performances tended to shy away from the

intention and parody rather than portray the requisite states There was, for example, despite Les Dayman's bluster, a tongue-in-cheek quality about Kinchela the swindling magistrate and his henchman Harvey Duff the police informer, spy and traitor. This reduced the idea of menace and evil upon which the moral weight of the melodrama relies Duff may have a couple of funny lines but as written he is a genuine bad lot, and the figure cut by Ted Hodgeman might have graced the border of any souvenir tea towel without giving offence, let alone provoking terror

On opening night it took the better part of two acts to establish the rattling pace of the piece, and the audience was content to bide its time till the onstage task of grooving the plot was complete But by Act III the parcel of innocents and a dog called Taters had the patrons clapping and capering to every jig and fiddle of Adelaide's resident shaugraun — Tony Strachan

This actor has a stock of cunning peasants in his dilly bag which he produces with ease and panache whenever the company feels the need for a popular touch in programming Last year we had a splendid Truffaldino in Goldoni's *The Servant of Two Masters* and now his Celtic cousin Conn In typical highly energised fashion Strachan closed with his audience, and with pantomime, mimicry, and dance, left his image in triplicate on the evening. His multi-faceted approach to characterisation is highly entertaining. From time to time however, his work suffers from a surfeit of communication, and might be tighter if more selective

Apart from Strachan's performance the production yielded an amusing Captain Molineux — played by Neil Fitzpatrick Here again actorly idiosyncracy had a field day, and the approach to this representative of honour love and duty was as caricatured as was Hodgeman's, to the vices of the piece Consequently, Fitzpatrick effected the performance coup of the evening as he deftly transformed a spit and polish poltroon into a reasonable facsimile of a soldier, in time to bring the villains to book

There were other strengths comeos from Audine Leith and Daphne Grey for example, and an almost Milliganesque wake But due credit should also be paid to the trio of Katrina Foster, Christine Mahoney and Nina Landis, whose spirit in the face of traditionally difficult material gave the production a well sustained dramatic centre, and a genuine sense that equal opportunity in love might indeed to tantamount to equal opportunity in life

For those readers not entirely convinced that a nineteenth century melodrama whether *The Shaugraun* or one of the locally written Darrell Dampier of Holt works of the period, could make such a view of the world palatable today, perhaps a quick read of Hibberd and Romeril's *Marvellous Melbourne (TA* 1977) will at least convince that the form itself still has much to offer those with something significant to say

# Best alternative theatre in Adelaide

## NO ROOM FOR DREAMERS

JOHN KIRBY

*No Room For Dreamers* by **George Hutchinson**. The Stage Company. The Balcony Theatre Opened 6 April 1979 Director & Designer **Brian Debnam.**

O'Kerr **David Hursthouse** William Chidley **Ron Rodger;** Priest Judge Sergeant Premier **John Noble** John Chidley Magistrate Doctor **Wayne Bell;** Mrs Chidley Policeman MP **Josephine Wardlewerth** Prostitute Lou Union Jackal MP **Maureen Sherlock** Ada Eva Ann Geist Policeman **Isobel Kirk** Maloney Policeman Gentleman **Richard Lawrance**

*(Professional)*

In some far, forgotten corner of Sydney that is forever Rookwood Cemetery lies William Chidley Martyr to vegetarianism, nudism and sexual freedom — or guilt ridden sensualist desperate to justify his passion to an inherited conscience dominated by the paternal dictum, "Conquer Carnality"?

Whatever the truth about Chidley — and George Hutchinson's play gives us a rounded picture from which to judge — the fact is that there was no room for dreamers of his ilk in turn of-the-century Australia

Chidley was born too late to be a hero and too early to be fashionable in a morally hypocritical society that crushed latter-day Saint Augustines who wanted to shout their redemption from hilltops like Sydney's Domain So long as Chidley stuck to extolling the virtues of fruit and nut diets, fresh air, sunshine and loose clothing he was tolerated as a harmless crank However, once the taboo word, sex, was mentioned, he became a doomed man

The Stage Company's production of Hutchinson's excellent, Brechtian style work is quite the best piece of alternative theatre (and ensemble acting) seen in Adelaide for some time Ron Rodger, who graduated as Best Actor of the Year from NIDA in 1974, plays Chidley with an interior fervour that elevates the famous eccentric to nothing less than the Isadora Duncan of naturopathy Resurrected reluctantly from the bowels of Brian Debnam's symbolic, but simple, set of drunken crosses and sturdy box platforms Rodger's quivering tormented Chidley takes us along the agonising path of repression debauchery, murder, VD salvation and madness that led to a fiery death in an insane asylum

*No Room For Dreamers* approaches its unfortunate subject in a completely different manner to Alma de Groen's play *Chidley*, and perhaps is the more successful because of its format of Brechtian music theatre sketches It is certainly the more entertaining and both director and performers have risen well to the challenge of Hutchinson's rhythmic dialogue

David Hursthouse makes an excellent chorus/narrator and Wayne Bell, just back from Britain, adds an earthy Dickensian air to the assorted judges and doctors he is called upon to play

Ron Hoenig (Ibiza) and Virginia Baxter (Eva Peron) in Troupe's *Eva Peron*
Photo: Penny Ramsay

# Uneasy sharing the same bill

## MRS THALLY F
## EVA PERON

BRUCE MCKENDRY

*Mrs Thally F* by **John Romeril** *Eva Peron* by Copi Troupe La Mama Theatre Adelaide SA Opened 26 April 1979 Director **Keith Gallasch**
With **Virginia Baxter, Pat Kelly, Wendy Madigan, Ron Hoenig, Peter Dunn**
*(Proam)*

Venturing into the hive of downtown Hindmarsh one discovers in a lane off the Port Road the La Mama Theatre, temporary venue for Troupe Hot on the trail of *Pike's Madness* the Red Shed people have served up two one actors; *Mrs Thally F* by John Romeril and *Eva Peron* by Copi

Both plays were disappointing and although rendered efficiently by director Keith Gallasch, seemed ill at ease sharing the same bill *Mrs Thally F* crumpled two thirds the way through, the actual structure of the play in an initial incline followed by a very slow decline The conventions of storytelling were the same throughout, with characters relating to the imagined Conversing with the invisible is convincing as an idea but loses in the repetition Based on real life, Mrs Fletcher was a lady who when tired of her husbands fed the poison in their tea and gradually sent them to their graves, her tally being two Her death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment An interesting study of one of Australia's lesser known crims

Where *Mrs Thally F* provided some entertaining dialogue *Eva Peron* seemed hollow and stereotyped The play moves well to its climax but always the interesting scenes never quite lift into the realms of high dramatic interest As the play is fictional in situation why couldn't the characters have more impressive things to say Eva is stuck in Paris supposedly about to die, Peron is with her along with her mother Eva's madness is a contrived PR exercise which ends in the death of her nurse, thanks to Ibiza, the villian of the plot I just wonder how much more enjoyable the play would have been had the subject matter been more relatable to the here and now Yes the Perons were news but surely to be more familiar with the real events would help an interpretation of the fictional

Out in force at Troupe's season were its complement of actresses In the fore Virginia Baxter playing Eva and the woman next door in *Mrs Thally F*, with great warmth she portrayed the Argentinian saint, making the transit from wild tyrant to sympathetic martyr gracefully and skilfully Pat Kelly played mother in both plays and did it well, physically the change was most convincing. Wendy Madigan, an actress with quite a voice, has a quality of madness suited to both characters, though as the poisoner her decline was unjust The two men in the cast, who only appeared in *Eva Peron*, were Ron Hoenig and Peter Dunn Ron Hoenig lent a studied interpretation to the evening, slinking amongst spirit bottles Peter Dunn, a hunk of a fella, came on as the enigmatic Peron struck by migraines and saying little but ended the play with the wordy announcement of Eva's end

Troupe the semi-professional about to become fully professional company are working hard at continuous productions Their next, Edward Bond's *Bingo* perhaps points to exciting, thought provoking programming With every play they mount the picture becomes brighter

## Q & Q Continued from page 4

I am to direct and Axel Bartz is the designer The Company's associate directors — Nick Enright and Kevin Palmer — are also involved in the production Nick Enright is responsible for the additional material and Kevin Palmer will co-direct with me

Kevin Palmer was Joan Littlewood's assistant director on the original production and says that it was always Littlewood's desire that subsequent productions in other countries would incorporate into the script their own involvement in World War I To date only Germany has done this in *Oh What A Lovely Peace* — and now South Australia with *Oh What A Lovely War, Mate!*

## TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN, SHEREE GUHL

**RICHARD O'DONOGHUE, Administrator RADA**

"Sheree, a former WAIT student from Western Australia is now in her second term at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art She has already proved herself to be a student of uncommon excellence and determination Her approach to training for her chosen profession is intelligent and flexible, combining imaginative insight with starkly practical application

Reports from tutors and directors indicate an actress of rare promise who is already well on the way to justifying the confidence placed in her likely ability by a unanimous board, which resulted in her being given one of only seven places available for some 250 applicants There is no question that on grounds of talent and character she is entitled to respectful consideration as a worthy candidate for support "

# Feminist and Feminine

## FEFU AND HER FRIENDS

SUZANNE SPUNNER

*Fefu And Her Friends* by Maria Irene Forbes. The Victorian College Of the Arts private house Elwood. Opened April 1979. Director Ros Horin, Set Design Lighting Peter Summerfield. Production Management Stage Management/Properties Peter Linlay and Jay Mannering. Fefu Carolyn Howard, Cindy Lynn Howard; Emma, Hannie Rayson; Christina Anne Tucky; Julia Suzie Fraser; Paula Cathy Lynch, Sue Amanda McIntosh; Amanda Pike (Proxam)

*Fefu And Her Friends* was written last year by the Spanish American writer, Maria Irene Forbes but it is set in the 1930s — the heady Lillian Hellman/Dorothey Parker days when female sensibility had a bitter sweet edge. Like Clare Booth Luce's *The Women* [1939] it has an all female cast but it is mercifully free of the bitchery which satirated the contemporary work. Nevertheless there are roles in *Fefu And Her Friends* which would suit a young Hepburn or Davis. While the play is clearly not of the seventies, it is difficult to imagine it being written without knowledge of New Wave Feminism. It is rare to see women's theatre which is not concerned with the situation of women today, yet it is its very distance which gives *Fefu And Her Friends* much of its strength. Because it is relieved of the ideological pressure of explicit relevance, the play is free to focus on the subtler aspects of female friendship. In this sense the play is Feminist in form and feminine in style.

The script required an elaborate and detailed period set and that four of the six scenes be repeated four times. After an unsuccessful attempt to mount the production in the Great Hall of the National Gallery of Victoria, director Ros Horin finally staged it in a double storey Art Deco mansion in the bayside suburb of Elwood. The choice of a non theatrical location did more than merely surmount the technical difficulties — the setting positively enhanced the production and measureably added to the final texture of the work. After pre performance sherries in the downstairs study the audience went upstairs and as it were met' the cast in an opening scene in which Fefu gathers together her women friends.

The audience had been divided into four groups and after this scene they were directed to four different rooms in the house where they encountered another scene, and so the audience was shuttled between the four intermediary scenes of the play. These four scenes were thus seen by each section of the audience in a different order. Finally everyone — cast and audience — assembled upstairs for the final scenes. The effect of moving from room to room and seeming to chance upon actors in conversation, with the knowledge that at the same time in other rooms other conversations were taking place which one had already heard or was about to become privy to, created an intimate domestic atmosphere and cast and audience into the not unwelcome role of peripetetic voyeur.

*Fefu and Her Friends.*

The play has elements of an earlier version of *The Group*. The characters are educated artistic middle class women in their late twenties who are meeting in Fefu's comfortable home to plan a fund raising cum theatrical event to publise their views on liberalising arts education in schools. Fefu like McCarthy's Lacey is a charismatic personality who orchestrates the interactions of her friends. On the surface vivacious and confident, she delights in the extremity of her pranks and attitudes which sometimes shock her friends but are invariably indulged. Behind the veneer of charm and sparkling wit there is a sense of deep disturbance and frustration in the inner lives of Fefu and some of her friends. The catalyst for the revelation of this disturbance is the dark and spectral presence of Fefu's oldest friend Julia — a cripple, whose paralysis may or may not be self willed. The parts of Fefu and Julia — the motivating forces and lynch pins of the drama were skilfully handled by Carolyn Howard and Suzie Fraser. Julia brings with her an acute intelligence of the universal historical oppression of women which is an intrinsic part of her personal death wish and Fefu is the only one who can recognise her pain for what it truly is — rebellion at the fate of being born woman in a patriarchal society. Fefu is the one with the greatest resilience and vitality, yet by the end of the play she too has been touched with this knowledge, Julia dies and Fefu servives — but the cost is known.

Thus, as the women reminise about their college days, wittily adumbrate the stages of a love affair or discuss the various marriages, divorces and liasons — both heterosexual and homosexual that they have been through since last they met the play's gossipy joie de vivre is shot through with the darker meanings of their lives. Nothing is ever overstated as the hard facts at its centre have an elusive hardly there but really there all the time quality about them. Because of the many levels of meaning the rapid mood changes and the mounting tension in the interchanges between the women which take place within a roundly naturalistic form, Ros Horin had a formidable task in selecting the correct pitch for each performance. Taking her cue from Fefu's own character she kept it light and fast in the main but at the same time without missing a beat, she was able to pare away a raw edge. She acheived fine ensemble work as well as some exceptional individual performances, both from the more experienced actors, Carolyn Howard and Suzie Fraser as well as from those less experienced. Among these Cathy Lynch as Paula and Hannie Rayson as Emma stood out.

*Fefu And Her Friends* was the first production of a newly formed Women's Theatre Group composed of drama students at The Victorian College of the Arts. It was also unfortunately Ros Horin's last Melbourne production before her departure to NIDA.

# One character richness

## NOTES FROM AN OLD MAN'S DIARY

JACK HIBBERD

*Notes from an Old Man's Diary* by Anton Chekhov. Hoopla, Playbox Theatre Melbourne. Opened 25 April 1979. Director Scott Ramsay; Designer Jennie Tate; Stage Manager Nicole Lecomple.
Nikolai Stepanovich, **Malcolm Robertson.**
*(Professional)*

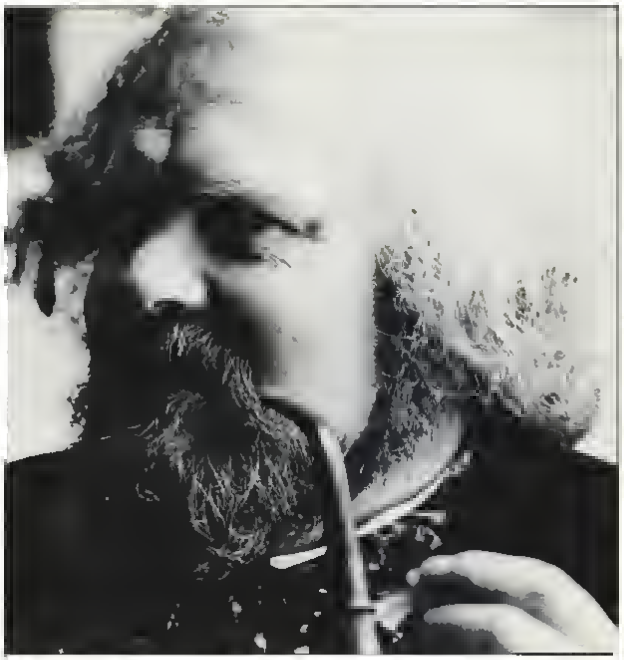
The one-character play, which is fast becoming a distinctive Australian theatrical mode, receives further attention in the adaptation by Malcolm Robertson and Scott Ramsay of Chekhov's prose work *Notes from an Old Man's Diary*. The dramatic treatment is good in that it is generally a rich and expressive vehicle for the actor, never slipping into the simply declamatory or literary. The lonesome character, Nikolai Stepanovich, is fully dimensioned and crucial to both action and situation. Accordingly, *Notes from an Old Man's Diary* is monodrama not monologue.

Though Stepanovich is an old man, his diary is in truth that of an egoist and hollow man. He is a successful man par excellence — a Privy Councillor, a Professor of Medicine, a person looked up to as a sage. He has clearly worked himself to a frazzle to achieve both professional perfection and high social rank.

Yet, as Chekhov and the play declare, these attainments are finally vexing and paltry. As an individual he has myopically ignored the human world around him — family, friends, and students. As a doctor, in the best sense, he is a joke. He has only doctored himself, and hasn't done too winningly at that.

For all his personal urbanity and charm, Stepanovich is all but a puritan and philistine, keenly envious of sensuality and creativity, things he has shut out and is also ill-equipped to handle. Paradoxically (yet logically) he spends a lot of his dotage ridiculing science and medicine. Having cultivated himself as a thinker, he comes to the glum conclusion that he has no philosophy, having lived as a non person, he suddenly finds he needs people — people who also need him and his intimate wisdoms. He is totally at a loss as how to help, both as a man and a doctor. Whereas once his self-obsessions were external, they are now internal, rendering him even more crippled.

Malcolm Robertson brings to this meaty material a refined, self-aware and comic touch. He stylishly avoids all the hack pitfalls of earnestness and melodrama (into which so many productions of Chekhov plays plummet), constantly shifting the ground of the character, slightly overplaying then undercutting, slightly over-theatrical then very real. What comes through very strongly (and this makes it a choice enactment) is the strong sense of a performer playing organically and dramatically with his performance. The evening is charged with a theatricality more meaningful than mere mimesis.



Malcolm Robertson in Hoopla's *Notes from an Old Man's Diary*. Photo: Tony Watts

So despite Stepanovich's derogatory utterances about the theatre and actors, this is ironically and deliberately an actor's theatre night. There is a clear theatrical sub theme in the evening. When Katya, his foster-daughter who has worked as an actress, declares *a crise* that she has no ability but a lot of vanity in explanation of her overdue defection from theatre, her confession could well be seen as not without application to much of Australian theatre.

Malcolm Robertson humanises Stepanovich enormously — perhaps too much at times. I would have relished the narrow bigotry and power mongering (the key to his worldly success) more punishingly pressed when it appears. This would fix more firmly our sense of his obtuseness and bloodymindedness, things not likely to abruptly evaporate at the time of his soul searchings and ante-mortem pangs. There is a marvellous element of irascibility in the character which Robertson captures but doesn't for my mind sufficiently force. The stronger his irascibility the stronger his impasse's pathos.

The second half of the play could do with some excisions. The last one quarter of the text tends to make explicit and explain what must be obvious to any half intelligent audience. This section of the play should concentrate on a collision of events and eschew all explanations and realisations as articulated by Stepanovich.

*Notes* operates essentially through the convention of externalising and dramatising the inner workings of a character. Hence devices like live voices and taped sounds intrude and rupture unfruitfully that convention. The director, whose hand is hard to discern in this show, should see to it that they rapidly disappear. The actor is eminently capable of creating the required effects. Strangely enough, gongs and bells work, they serve to enhance the isolation of the character.

The design, by Jennie Tate, is mainly notable for its lack of books and the samovar — a literalism that is not expiated by the literalism of the working set: all autumnal browns and golds and russets with family portraits etc... it is neither convincingly naturalistic nor purposively expressionist. It is agreeably functional and painterly. The performance by the actor in the end makes it rather irrelevant.

*Notes from an Old Man's Diary* elevates Malcolm Robertson to the top league of Australian actordom. When the show settles down and redundancies are chopped it will award audiences a rare and rich night of pleasures. When I enjoyed it on opening night its pleasures were far in excess of its faults. With more confidence in himself, his audience, and the *essential* dramatic material, Robertson will finally discard those few moments of actorly and over mannered performance, moments that only occasionally taint a clean sheet.

Michael Freundt and Gerard Kennedy in Hoopla's *Antigone* Photo Jeff Busby

## ANTIGONE

RAY STANLEY

*Antigone* by Sophocles in a new English version by **Murray Copland**, with lyrics by **Nikolaos Georgiou**. Hoopla Theatre Foundation, Playbox Melbourne Opened April 18 1979 Directed and designed by **Murray Copland**; Assistant to Director **Michael Freundt**, Music Specially Composed by **Nikolaos**, Choreography **Nadia** Production Manager **Sandra Matlock** Lighting Design **Robert Gebert** and **Yvonne Hockey** Sound Effects **Steve Young**
Antigone **Amanda Muggleton**, Ismene **Belinda Davey**; Creon **Gerard Kennedy** Sentry **Jim Danton**, Haemon **Michael Freundt**, Teiresias **Bruce Kerr**; Messenger **John Pratt**; Eurydice **Belinda Davey**, Musician **Nikolaos Georgiou**; Singer **Nadia**.
*(Professional)*

If I could have forgotten all about Sophocles... no doubt I should totally have enjoyed Murray Copland's *Antigone* Maybe even if I had received prior warning But I went along to the theatre expecting to see a performance of Sophocles' great tragedy, and it did not seem to be that at all There was altogether too much a musical comedy air about the proceedings

It was a little off putting at the beginning when a very convivial chorus came on in contemporary dress presumably in the guise of villagers and started jabbering away at what was all Greek to me (and, unlike the Chaplain in Fry's *The Lady's Not For Burning* I do not happen to understand Greek) Mercifully they soon lapsed into English

It worried me thoughout that the players were stepping back and forth from the chorus into their character roles so that at times, as villagers, Haemon and Antigone were lamenting their own deaths However I realise this was necessitated through the Hoopla Theatre Foundation's need for economies.

Copland's direction of *Dirty Linen* impressed me, and his direction as a whole of *Antigone* can hardly be faulted In fact I believe that in Copland we could have a major Australian director The action was broken up with Greek dancing and Greek songs, accompanied by Nikolaos Georgiou on bouzouki There was a very authentic atmosphere of contemporary Greece It was all very charming, diverting, entertaining, well executed and frequently quite humorous But it served to take away from the tragedy of Antigone who was slain for burying her dead brother

There have been previous occasions when, witnessing performances of *Antigone*, I have left the theatre feeling like a squeezed out sponge after watching the tragedy building and building to an almost impossible crescendo There was nothing of this about the Hoopla production one left the theatre in an almost joyful mood

On the strength of a play by Murray Copland, it was most entertaining As Sophocles — well, I should like to see Copland direct Sophocles' *Antigone* in a more recognisably straight version I think he could make it an exciting experience But then again, he would have to get himself a new set of actors In my opinion only Belinda Davey (playing Ismene) would be capable of performing in such a production.

Within the confines of Copland's *Antigone* the Antigone of Amanda Muggleton and Gerard Kennedy's Creon just about come off, but are rather outclassed by Bruce Kerr's, Teiresias Jim Danton's Sentry is a comedy role straight out of *The Student Prince* or some other musical of that vintage Neither Michael Freundt nor John Pratt seemed strong enough for their roles, although quite obviously they were trying to do their best

A brave attempt on the part of Hoopla but one which in my book did not come off But if Copland had simply written a play loosely based on the Antigone legend ...

It might be added that *Antigone* has been specially staged by Hoopla for the schools, and performances timed for 10 30 am and 1 15 pm

# Football is show business

## THE GRAND, GRAND FINAL SHOW

JULIE COPELAND

English theatre director, Albert Hunt hopes that theatre can sometimes be as exciting as football and at a recent event in Melbourne he realised his aim

Hunt is influenced by the theatre of Bertold Brecht and Joan Littlewood but what really interests him is the relationship between performers and their audience He says, "theatre is about making things real, which means performing events to specific audiences who know what you're talking about "

In pursuit of this kind of realism he has re enacted the Russian Revolution with local inhabitants in the streets of Bradford in England and staged a commemoration of the bombing of Dresden both in England and in Dresden itself

In Australia, during the 1974 election, members of the Queensland Popular Theatre Troupe, with whom he was working sat behind Bjelke Petersen during an election speech in a Brisbane Shopping Centre, clapping and cheering with paper bags on their heads, thus turning the political speech into a theatrical farce

The latest of his non-conventional theatre events has made history by bringing together art and sport — namely VFL football, which Hunt believes is Melbourne's own, and only original art form.

Of course the spectacle of the Big Men Flying has gripped the imagination of other Australian writers like Alan Hopgood David Williamson and Barry Oakley, but none have written specifically *for* a football audience, or involved footballers' participation, which made the performance of *The Grand Grand Final Show* at the Collingwood Football Club unique

Albert Hunt collaborated with Melbourne playwright Ray Mooney (who is also Collingwood's physical training instructor, drama lecturer, Roberta Bunnin drama students from the Victorian College of the Arts and Collingwood football players to present the show to an audience of over 350 of the Club's supporters. Collingwood has the highest membership and largest following of any Melbourne team and the atmosphere was one of a large, fervently loyal, family gathering,

After dinner was served, the beer flowed and Albert Hunt played bar room piano in the background The lights dimmed as a voice boomed across the empty stage, decked with black and white balloons (the colours of Collingwood better known as the The Magpies'), "In the beginning was Collingwood and Collingwood said let there be football and there was football ', and so on

Following this re-cap of Genesis a hearty compere introduced us to a young woman in a Collingwood guernsey and sheer black stockings who acted out the history of the club from 1890 onwards with energetic interruptions from a rival team and the umpire played by a young aboriginal actress in tight white shorts, peaked cap and white flags Not being familiar with the jargon ritual and rules of football, I found the disputes about who invented the drop-kick and why Collingwood hasn't won the premiership flag since 1958 fascinating

The closest the Club came to winning the flag in recent times was in 1977, when they drew with North Melbourne in the Grand Final and were beaten in the re match The spectre of this defeat still haunts Collingwood and since North Melbourne is seen as the arch-enemy, there was naturally a send-up of North's super coach Ron Barassi and his famous dressing room peptalk to players. Two large video screens on stage showed the actors/players being harangued backstage by the compere turned coach, with such lines as "I don t want to see you dominate the audience — I want you to *slay* them", after which they are seen doing ten penalty push ups while practising their lines

The audience loved it, and the performance emphasised the parallel between spectator sport and theatre Football is show business And the young players really experience all the glamour of stars This also became evident when the video screens showed some of the players sitting around like film stars derding their critics — in this case the sporting writers and football commentators. The most effective insults still seem to be suggestions of female or homesexual tendencies.

But the tension really built up during the replay of that fatal 1977 Last Quarter, as the audience relived the trauma, listening to Collingwood's coach Tom Hafey's voice over the film and watching the players post mortem of the game. The audio/visual effects were used effectively, running like a stream of consciousness as interludes between the scripted and musical segments of the show, in counterpoint to the more frenetic action on stage

In the final quarter the football players dismissed the actors and performed strange rites of their own One of the footballers cut the long, beautiful blond curls of another player on stage, making illusions to Samp,son — while the haircut was in progress, two attractive young players, wearing nothing but very short, black and white frilled skirts and socks waved bunches of Collingwood streamers and sang "Come on Magpies, Come On, Come On ' (to that much plagarised tune), with their double image projected on the video screen behind them.

I watched the spectators' response closely during the show and wondered what they made of it all At first some looked rather uncomfortable Was this going to be a send up of their venerable old Club and the beloved Game? (A couple of members of the press had been ordered to leave before the performance when they announced they had come "to watch the footballers make fools of themselves ")

Supporters and players I spoke to after the performance thought that apart from being entertained they had all learned something about the Club, past and present, and it had helped break down barriers between players and followers Ray Mooney felt that the Club had responded to a new dimension in entertainment, which was a breakthrough for a conservative football club accustomed to watching pre packaged shows like Rene Geyer or Stan Munroe's "Les Girls'

In line with his philosophy of living theatre, Albert Hunt believes that instead of starting with French farce or Shakespeare, Australian drama students should be looking at ways of performing their own culture, an objective the actors from the Victorian College of the Arts achieved with great enthusiasm on the night At last they had produced theatre as exciting as a Grand Final!

"The Magpie Machine"

# Literate, demanding, exciting, strong

## TRAITORS

GARRIE HUTCHINSON

*Traitors* by **Stephen Sewell**, Australian Performing Group, Pram Factory Front Theatre, Melbourne, Vic. Opened April 1979. Director **Kerry Dwyer**; Assistant **Nano Nagle**; Designer **Dave May**; Music **Andrew Bell**; Lighting, **Tony Watts**

Musicians, **Elizabeth Drake**, **Sally Ford**, **Beth Turner**, **Eddy van Hoosendael**, **Bob Weiss**, **Andrew Bell**.

Anna: **Sue Ingleton**; Ekaterina, Anna: **Judy McHenry**; Rubin, **Mark Minchington**; Mother Dybenko: **Nadezdah Jan Cornall**; Krasin: **Wilfred Last**; Lebeshev: **Bill Garner**

*(Professional)*

Stephen Sewell's *Traitors* is one of the most impressive Melbourne debuts by a writer since the good old days. And the production given to his play by the Australian Performing Group has a standard of acting and directing not seen for some time. I haven't been more impressed since the Lindsay Smith/Peter Corrigan/John Romeril *Floating World* five years ago: the play's as good, and the production shows the virtues of experience.

*Traitors* is set in the Stalinist Russia of 1927. Lenin has been dead for four years, and the battles inside the Communist Party over the direction of the Revolution are still being fought. Trotsky, Zinoviev and Stalin are still battling it out. (Of course in the historical USSR things were more complex but Sewell rightly has selected a few exemplars to make his subject theatrically viable.) The paranoid delusions of Stalin's terrorist policy are being hacked out: the State security apparatus CHEKA, forerunner of the bloody and sinister KGB, is an infant. On the other hand the Civil War is not long over and using a nice ironical device Sewell has a prologue and epilogue set in 1941 where even the underground opposition to Stalin unites to fight the Nazis. The Revolution was indeed under threat, even the factions inside the Communist Party were agreed on that. The question was whether a "loyal" opposition was to be allowed to exist, whether individual liberty was allowable under the difficult circumstances of the Soviet Union only ten years after 1917. What role did personality play? Had the revolution meant anything at all to personal relationships, to the relationships between individuals, ideals and party?

The answer in *Traitors* is that there is no answer possible. Certainly Sewell is on the side of the left oppositionists, but he is "realistic" enough to show that in broad terms there was some justification for a unified party point of view. The revolution was not yet over.

However the play's presentation of the growing bureaucracy, the use of torture and extremely manipulative public relations excercises (the beginnings of forced confessions and show trials, CHEKA supported fake counter-revolutionaries, the whole Watergate/Muldergate box and dice) is beautifully detailed and explained. Sewell and the APG obviously hold no brief for Stalinism, which is good to know (!)

These things are presented to us in a series of shortish scenes that director Kerry Dwyer has imaged and placed extremely well. There are a couple of slow moments, especially where things are supposed to be a touch romantic, and confusing on the occasions at the beginning and end of the play where the time shifts from 1941 to 1927 and back again.

Certainly, the actors in the play would have been able to provide a number of insights into bureaucracy, secrecy, freedom and political activity. The history of the APG has surely contributed several wrinkles to those honourable callings.

But the actors give performances the equal of anything that has been seen at the Pram Factory. Gill Garner's Lebeshev is a beautifully detailed combination of a Russian ocker, and Wilfred Last's Krasin is the best thing I've seen him do. Suave and urbane when in control, an efficient interrogator, a troubled, yet enthusiastic torturer, an enthusiastic, though unadventurous lover, Krasin is a complex character carried off very well, wholly by Wilfred Last.

But perhaps the performance of the show is from Sue Ingleton. In the past her work has tended to be a bit one-dimensionally satirical in comedies, or technically "actorly", especially when she was involved with the Stasis group. Here, however, in a terrifically confident performance she sustains a difficult combination of personal feminism related strongly to contradictory radicalism. I hope it's not insulting to call it a womanly performance. Sexually proud and strong, politically romantic, Anna is the most complete character in the play. She is still alive in 1941, still with her ideals, and still fighting the Nazis. In 1941 that's not bad for a Russian Communist Woman.

Doubtless there was a great deal of work on the text, by director Kerry Dwyer and the cast, but that is what we should be able to expect from companies doing new Australian plays. *Traitors* stands up well to comparison to the best "political" playwrights around — David Hare, Trevor Griffiths and Howard Barker. It is literate, demanding, exciting, strong, biased and it has been given supportive concrete images, a strong line and good pace by Kerry Dwyer, and the actors.





## LETTERS

Continued from page 6

Dear Sir,

It's always gratifying to have one's response to a critic printed. But I don't see why Mr Mckendry's (sic) reply to my points should have been set above my name in *TA* March 1979. Even less apparent is the reason why Mr Mckendry doesn't do his journalistic homework and present facts in his reports on The Stage Company.

Here are a few of the facts:

1. The Stage Company worked as a co-operative until recently, its actors receiving pay for five of its first six productions. We don't give visiting critics photo-stat copies of the Treasurer's report on each show.
2. Equity members with international experience who work with and for The Stage Company do not like being called "amateurs" — even if they are not getting minimum Equity rates for their hard work.
3. Every actor in *Windows* was paid.
4. Recent funding from the South Australian government ensures that actors and crew in future Stage Company productions will be paid full Equity rates.

   Here's a mark of the SA Government's recognition of The Stage Company's professional status and artistic viability.
5. If *Theatre Australia* only prints rumours about The Stage Company instead of the facts we are unlikely to look upon what's printed as good interstate publicity.

I always thought Mr Mckendry's name was spelt McKendry.

Yours sincerely,

**Geoff Pullan,**
**Secretary, Management Committee**
**Stage Company, Adelaide**


Wanda Davidson, Klaus Schulz, Bernie Davis, and Vivienne Plumb in the Hole's *City Sugar*.

# Brilliantly conceived and executed

## CITY SUGAR

COLLIN O'BRIEN

*City Sugar* by Steve Poliakoff. The Hole in the Wall Theatre Perth WA. Opened 20 April 1979. Director: Colin McColl; Designer: Bill Dowd.
Leonard Brazil, Bernie Davis; Rex, Klaus Scholz; Big John, Frank Johnson; Nicola Davies, Vivienne Plumb, Susan Sara Smith; Jane, Wanda Davidson.
*(Professional)*

Stephen Poliakoff is one of the new wave of British dramatists, an exciting bunch who vary in style from the mind blowing linguistic bravura of Heathcote Williams, the poetic power of Steven Berkoff (in *East*) to the hard realism of David Edgar Barry Keeffe and Poliakoff. One thinks of these last three as the true inheritors of fifties playwrights such as Arnold Wesker, part of the progression from *Look Back in Anger*, where for the first time a North country accented red-brick-educated articulate young man stalked the stage. 'Conceited young puppy' snorted one middleclass critic, used to having only his own Cowardy-Rattiganian sensibilities given footroom. 'Yes' retorted Kenneth Tynan, 'the most effectively conceived conceited young puppy on the English stage since Hamlet, Prince of Denmark.'

These new realist dramatists witheringly expose the spiritual aridity of our time, a world of musak, processed foods devoid of taste or nourishment, soulless glass and concrete urban centres which are hives of grime and grafitti, the bleak, inhuman landscape of the mid-seventies. They gain enormous strength by being sharply contemporary. I remember seeing David Edgar's *Destiny* performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1977.

It is a study of the rise of the National Front, and in it there is a by-election won by the Conservatives, with Labour a poor second, the Liberals losing their deposit but the National Front keeping theirs. A gasp escaped the audience: this had actually happened the week before I saw the play, but had been foreseen by the playwright when it was written two years before. *Destiny* was one of the few occasions when I have seen an audience react — even vocally — to events onstage because they were vitally current issues, a tribute to the relevance of the playwrights and a vindication of the serious support British subsidised theatres give them. Poliakoff, for instance, is writer in Residence at the National Theatre of Great Britain.

In his earlier play *Hitting Town* Poliakoff

movingly showed an incestuous relationship between a sister and brother as the only vital force in the bleak sterility of their lives. Two characters from that play move centre stage in *City Sugar*. One is Leonard Brazil, a top DJ from one of those stations devoted to pop, ads for junkfood and phone ins. He is awash with self disgust at the pap he feeds his mindless audience. He is also acutely aware of the loss of the promise of the mid-sixties that time of hope when the Beatles were kings and the young in revolt at the universities, lead by people such as Danny Cohn Bendit and Tariq Ali. Perhaps our hopes in those days were naive and a bit too dependant on mind-expanding drugs, but what hope there was has since faded into the structural unemployment hopelessness of today.

Brazil homes in on a mindless product of the system, a soulless girl in a supermarket, Nicola Davies, the other character from *Hitting Town*. In one of those trumped up commercial competitions he tries to humiliate her to the point of revolt, but can only elicit monosyllabic answers and I don't know what I think. Polskoff has reinforced his play by the juxtaposition of three settings: the frozen food section of the supermarket where Nicola works under the watchful eye of the managements' camera, her sterile bedroom with its popstar posters, and Brazil's grotty studio.

I said in my review of *Gone With Hardy* that I felt we had to suspend judgement on the Hole's new director, Colin McColl. I am pleased now to say that he has come through with flying colours. This play has been mounted with great power and precision. Bill Dowd's set perfectly captures the feel of each locale, and the acting is excellent all round.

I especially liked Bernie Davis as Brazil: he managed the right blend of blandness and disgust, and nicely judged Brazil's breakdown, at the end of Act One, to the refrain 'Don't spit on the animals'. Excellent, too, was an actress we haven't seen before, Vivienne Plumb in the part of Nicola. Frank Johnson made a good fist of the newsreader Big John, as did Klaus Schulz of the ambitious, watchful, seedy young puppyfat technician Rex. Also good were the actresses who played two other girls: Sara Smith as Nicola's friend Susan, a violent character under the funny/vulgar surface, and Wanda Davidson as Nicola's adversary in the competition, ferreteyed, with a vacant face and mouth bulging with bubblegum.

The world of the play is conveyed through powerful images: the rain coming down in black bucketfuls, a girl at a pop concert having her face rubbed in her own vomit by a bruiser, the soggy, mucky mess of defreezing packet food. The play exudes the *Clockwork Orange* feel of those dreary, Poulsenesque English urban redevelopments, places like Coventry or Birmingham, or the site of this play, Leicester.

This play is brilliantly conceived and executed. It should not be missed by anyone interested in contemporary theatre, or the malaise of our times.

# Unashamedly a frolic

## THE BEGGAR'S OPERA

DEREK MOORE MORGAN

In his contemporary History of Music, Sir John Hawkins writes: "At the time when the opera was in its most flourishing state [1727] was brought on the stage *The Beggar's Opera*, written by Mr John Gay; it had a run of 63 nights during which the operas of *Richard I* and *Admetus* were performing at the Haymarket, and, as it is said, but to thin audiences."

Hawkins saw Captain Macheath as a hero figure with "his whole life represented as an uninterrupted pursuit of criminal gratifications, in which he has the good fortune to succeed, and in the end to escape with impunity". Hawkins regarded the piece as a threat to society and an open encouragement to lawlessness.

I doubt if many of the first night audience for *Beggar's Opera*, staged by the WA Opera Company at the Playhouse Theatre, would have been overly concerned with the morality or otherwise of the plot.

Courageously presented in Britten's deftly crafted version of 1948, and using the proper chamber size orchestra, conductor Alan Abbott brought his operatic experience to bear on this score which so successfully bridges the gap between the tunes and the spoken word, giving a depth and colour to the whole thing, which started life as "pop opera" — a thing of shreds and patches with the slightest of musical pretensions designed to hit the ordinary folk right where it would hurt most, in their pockets.

The WA Arts Orchestra players maintained a fair and consistent standard throughout the evening, and though at times intonation and finish were a trifle doubtful, there were moments of pleasing individual quality, notably from horn and cello. Britten's often abrasive accompaniment textures undoubtedly had the singers puzzled at times but they battled to good avail, though not without showing a general tendency to sing too loud for too long.

Edgar Metcalfe's production went unashamedly for a frolic, and he achieved a great deal of movement and vitality, aided and abetted by Ken Campbell. Dobbie's lively stage direction. Setting and costumes contributed to a general atmosphere of bawdy squalor, thanks to Graham Maclean's instinct for atmosphere and colour, while the suggestion, rather than the reality, of scene setting considerably assisted the feeling of movement.

Tenor Gerald Stern dealt professionally with the central figure of Macheath, using a light hearted approach to his unfortunate entanglements with womankind and with the law. His leg iron chain gave up the unequal struggle all too soon, but he remained undeterred by the mishap. A greater degree of vocal inflexion was needed for variety, and this applied also to the singing of Terry Johnson, as the frightfully ill used Polly Peacham, and to Jacinth Oliver as Lucy Lockit. Their songs tended to be hard working rather than expressive. Cliff Arndt created a suitably smooth rogue in Mr Peacham and Valerie Melrose was his sleazy over blown spouse, exuding a horribly glutinous yet faded vulgarity. Together with Edward Holding as Lockit, the turnkey, they used facial expression to the full.

The ladies and gentlemen of the town's gutters combined with a lively beggar woman as prologue [Margaret Ford] to create something of a feeling of dishevelled poverty befitting the criminal classes, revelling in their misdeeds.

Britten's sensitivity of feeling and the earthiness of *Beggar's Opera* make curious bedfellows. No doubt it was an attraction of opposites which led him to produce this score, or more probably he was impelled by the desire to create a bridge spanning the gulf between conflicting periods and styles.

The wise Dr Johnson said of *Beggar's Opera* that "more influence has been ascribed to it than it in reality ever had, for I do not believe that Man was ever made a rogue by being present at its representation", while admitting that there was in the work "such a labefactation (sic!) of all principles as might be injurious to morality."

# Unfailingly funny

## GEORGE AND MILDRED

COLLIN O BRIEN

*George and Mildred* by Johnnie Mortimer and Brian Cooke. Regal Theatre Perth WA Opened 4 April 1979 Director Tony Clayton; Designer Terry Parsons.
Mildred Roper Yootha Joyce; George Roper Brian Murphy, Ethel Pomfrey Wendy Blacklock, Humphrey Pomfrey Ron Hackett, Jennifer Frazer Carol Adams, Shirley Liz Marshall. *(Professional)*

What (I hear you ask) has a sober, serious minded, judicious critic such as O Brien to say about a show like *George and Mildred?* It is an unashamed exploitation of popular television personae and therefore predictable, not aimed at a usual theatre audience but at people usually glued to the haunted fish-tank George and Mildred began life as secondary characters in the domestic comedy series *Man About the House* and graduated later to their own show Although this is comedy writing team Johnnie Mortimer and Brian Cooke's first stage play, it would have proved no great hassle, as the same skills are required for half hour realistic domestic comedy on the box as the two-hour traffic of similar stuff on stage

What is fascinating about our predilection for comic characters such as George and Mildred is the light it throws on our collective consciousness Why do we find unfailingly funny a series of one line gags involving a voracious but sex-starved woman and a man who is an odd mixture indeed on the one hand he furtively ogles soft-core porn such as the girlies on page three of popular newspapers, and on the other wafts both metaphorically (and, I suppose, literally) at the least suggestion of real sexual contact? Is Mildred a means of siphoning off or at least allaying male fears of women, an embodiment — God help us — of *vagina dentata* (or if you are of poetic bent, *vulva piranha)?*

Does laughter at George, that embodiment of dandruff of the soul and halitosis of the psyche defuse our fears of sexual inadequacy, impotence or — perish the thought — castration? And don't think there isn't such theatre about I remember in London in 1977 seeing a play in one of those poky (!) experimental theatres in which a couple of girls debagged and de y fronted a chap, then came at him large pairs of scissors merrily clicking away There wasn t a man in the house who didn t have his hands clasped protectively before him, his lips dancing a tango The sensation was, I swear akin to coming down in a very fast lift The whole business gave a new dimension to the concept of Theatre of Cruelty

In order to elongate events from a half to two hours the stage play of *George and Mildred* is fleshed out (so to speak) by Mildred s sister Ethel calling on them Her problem is the opposite of Mildred's Her husband, Humphrey, insists that she turn it on for him every day at four in the afternoon The reason for choosing this time is that he wants to be through (again so to speak) by the time the Wombles appear on television "But they don't come on until five thirty!" drools Mildred, "I know' sighs her sister, which gives you a fair idea of the style of humour The ladies go off on a continental holiday, Humphrey lines up two girls for himself and George for dinner and afters, but of course the ladies return victims of an airport strike By then George wouldn't you know, has spilt a drink down his inamorata's dress, so she is in bra and knickers need I go on?

The acting is competent as one would expect, Yootha Joyce coming across very much as she does on the gogglebox Of course Mildred is not her first foray as the rapacious female you will remember that in *Me Mammy* she displayed a healthy Protestant lust for the guilt haunted Catholic flesh of Milo O'Shea Mind you, I doubt consummation would have been possible for him other than in a surplice in a sacristy on a bed of Lutheran bibles. Brian Murphy as George played it a little more exaggeratedly, closer to parody than on television

I have in the past commended commercial managements such as Interstar et al at the Regal for bringing out such comedy teams, they do get people into the theatre who would not otherwise go, even though, ironically, they will only go to see at a distance but live, exact reproductions of characters and situations they usually watch in electronic closeup "Here's fine revolution' as Hamlet once remarked as he toed a skull," and we had the trick to see it"

Yootha Joyce and Brian Murphy in *George and Mildred* Photo T G Woodman

Julia Moody as Simone West in the Hole's *Approaching Simone.*

# Discipline, precision, hard work and commitment

## APPROACHING SIMONE

COLLIN O'BRIEN

*Approaching Simone* by **Megan Terry** (adapted by **Wanda Davidson**). The Hole in the Wall, Perth WA. Opened 27 April 1979. Director: **Wanda Davidson**; Lighting Designer: **Roger Selleck**; Stage Manager: **Imre Ungvary**; Icon: **Ross Schmidt.**
Simone Weil: **Julia Moody**; Simone's father: Albert: Head of School Board, Alain: worker manager: Pierre: Father Perrin: Harlem Preacher: **Ross Coli**; Simone II, schoolgirl: **Pam Nilan**, Simone's Mother: Gertie: schoolgirl: Madeleine: **Michelle Stanley**; Tookie, schoolgirl, Claire: **Denise Kirby**, Caroline: schoolgirl: woman at revival: **Caroline McKenzie**; Brother waiter: **Vincent Ungvary**
*(Professional)*

Simone Weil was a between-the-wars contemporary and friend of Albert Camus, Jean Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. She died in England in 1943 and at the age of thirty-four from self-imposed starvation, a response to the enforced hunger of her fellow countrymen in occupied France.

A professional philosopher, marxist and mystic, it is possible to see in her passionate commitment something of Sartre's existentialist idea: a person in what he does. Simone believed that the only way to really understand the relationship between work and the worker was to become one, and she did. Realizing the tremendous imaginative power of the fanatical brutality of Hitler's SS, her counter idea was to have women at the front to tend the wounded until medical help arrived. This would mean certain death for the women, but was compassionate propaganda in action' as opposed to the verbal propaganda behind the lines.

I had read Megan Terry's *Approaching Simone* script before seeing the version adapted and directed by Wanda Davidson as a late-night show in the Hole in the Wall. Terry's script reads as a collage of scenes worked up through improvisation, calling for multiple stages and a number of spectacular effects, such as two floor-to-ceiling cherubs with rings in their navels which, when pulled, spill either jello and candy jewels or ashes, bones and plastic dolls over the audience. As with most improvisational scripts, I was unsure whether it would all work other than with the original cast.

What Wanda Davidson has done — to my mind correctly — is to work up her own script, taking account of the Hole's stage and the smaller cast she has. And she has brought off quite a coup. In my view the Davidson version is more taut and less tricksey than Megan Terry's, and goes more deeply to the heart of Simone's personality and ideas. In short, Miss Davidson has taken Megan Terry's script as a starting point and both deepened and honed it, at the same time eschewing its flashier stage effects.

The show exhibits discipline, precision, hard work and commitment from the technical side to the performances. Julia Moody — an actress we see too little of — makes a fine job of Simone, and Ross Coli is excellent in a number of male roles. The discipline and hard work are borne out in the performances of a quartet of girls (Pam Nilan, Michelle Stanley, Denise Kirby and Caroline McKenzie) who both take a series of individual parts and unite as groups (workers, schoolgirls, etc.). There is also pleasing certainty and style in the work of the youngest member of the cast, a young boy named Vincent Ungvary.

I cannot but sadly note that such serious experimental theatre as *Approaching Simone* used to be the province of the University, but passed to the Greenroom (before it was closed) and these Hole-in-the-Pocket productions. I remember *Jonn the Boys*, *Moby Dick Rehearsed* and *The Comedians* last year. I am not so idiotic as to think that they are the better for being done on a shoestring, but am nevertheless pleased to see that young and talented theatre people are willing to commit themselves wholeheartedly to such projects.

I have given high praise to the play the Hole offers earlier in the evening, *City Sugar*. The theatre is offering the two together for a reduced $5.50. For my money this represents the best five-and-a-half bucks worth you can find around in these inflationary times.

# Internal Changes in the RSC

## Irving Wardle

As usual, the Royal Shakespeare Company's return to full time business reawakens one's awe at the scale of the operation. Preceded by their now regular stint in Newcastle upon Tyne (thirteen productions over seven weeks), the main season opened with *The Merry Wives Of Windsor* immediately after April Fool's Day, since when two other new productions have joined the Stratford repertory, plus four transfers to the company's London theatres by the end of the month.

It is the secret of the RSC to maintain this kind of output without any monolithic hardening of the arteries. As an organism, it presents a continuous pattern of upward mobility, and one interest in picking up the threads in Spring is to see what internal changes have happened since the previous autumn. There is now a rather conspicuous gap in the upper ranks in the absence of Alan Howard and last year's luminous visitors. The obvious candidate for Howard's position is Ben Kingsley, who has so far delivered a stunning double act as the instigator and victim of marital jealousy, playing Iachimo in *Cymbeline* and Ford in the *Merry Wives*.

Other conspicuous shifts and promotions are those of Bob Peck, one of nature's Horatios, now revealed as a superb clown in a hulkingly epicene performance of Cloten and Richard Griffiths, hitherto the company's resident peasant clown, now reborn as Prince of Navarre in *Love's Labour's Lost*, a bulky bookworm who brings the house down on the line "I have been closely shrouded in this bush" when we have just watched his prolonged struggles to get out of it. There has also been an influx of young studio actors onto the main stage, playing minor classical roles with the same realist observation they have previously expended on Manchester slum derelicts and Laingian mental patients. The result of these and other changes is to strengthen the company's main hold on our attention to speak Shakespeare correctly, and as if it had never been spoken before.

The other seasonal renewal is the one that overtakes Stratford productions a year later on transfer to London, though in the case of John Barton's *Love's Labour's Lost* (Aldwych) Stratford got it right first time. The great achievement of this lovely show is to cut through the quibbling mannered couplets so as to reveal precise individuals behind the courtly silhouettes, and to evoke a physical sense of arcadia that embraces every character on stage, pedants, peasants, and nobility alike. From the way they all talk and move, they are conscious of inhabiting a blessed place, breathing a different air: even Paul Brooke's porky Holofernes, sliding luxuriously to the ground to listen to a love poem and tear it to shreds, becomes a lyrical figure. The lynchpin of the production is Allan Hendrick's Costard: not a buffoon but a genially puckish boy, equal to any social encounter and coming into his own as master of ceremonies in the Worthies charade, reconciling all differences until the final shadow of mortality falls across the comedy.

By the time Trevor Nunn's *Merry Wives* reaches London, I imagine it will have shed some of its hectic details, such as the cohorts of conker swinging juveniles, and the village idiot, Simple, who all too literally stops the show. Otherwise the production completes the reclamation job Terry Hands did on the play four years ago, banishing the idea of a pot-boiling farce in favour of an affectionately realistic portrait of a Tudor bourgeoisie closer to Stratford than to Windsor. The key to this approach is the deliberate sacrifice of Falstaff: no longer a comic character, but a robust maypole for the others to dance round. John Woodvine's Falstaff will live in my memory as the only fleeing witch of Bramford who ever fought back, but he functions mainly as a carnival monster among a human crowd.

Some of the peripheral comedy is marvellous: involving some immensely prolonged double takes and manic search routines and quantities of meticulously considered characterisation. The star turn is undoubtedly Kingsley's Ford: a shrilly status conscious parvenu, as reckless with his money as he is tight fisted with his wife's honour, superbly matched against Bob Peck's pipe smoking Page: a complacent long term resident. This kind of high pressure detail carries over into the smallest parts, and when you walk into the theatre from the street you still feel in the same place.

As *Cymbeline* is David Jones' farewell production before he takes over the direction of the Brooklyn Academy, it would be nice to fire off a parting salute. True: the show contains Peck's astonishing Cloten and a powerful central duel between Judi Dench's madonna Imogen and Kingsley's machavellian Iachimo. But the manifold problems of this enigmatic romance — its unheroic hero, its prophetic elements, its notorious last act — are barely acknowledged. What we get is the stand RSC stage, an empty box with black and silver draperies for the Roman scenes and dyes of warmer hue for the antique Britons. At least you can tell where you are at a glance: but there is no sense of where you are going. Even Shaw, who despised the play, admitted that its last act dream might work as a baroque masque. All we get at Stratford is a plodding parade of ghosts masked like bank robbers, and a descending chandelier for Jupiter's chariot.

One day a director may reveal the play in Edward Bond's terms as a surrealist reworking at *King Lear* with a god descending from heaven to tell Shakespeare to stop asking awkward questions.

RSC in *Love's Labour's Lost* directed by John Barton. Photo: Donald Cooper

# Broadway, Off and On

## Karl Levett

Increasingly, the state of the Broadway musical indicates the health of Broadway. Serious drama has scurried to the more receptive regions of Off Broadway and Off Off Broadway, while crowd pleasing comedies have become very scarce items. Of the twenty four current shows on Broadway, fifteen of them are some sort of musical entertainment. With musicals established as Broadway's principal export, there is joy to the world in discovering a show the calibre of Stephen Sondheim's recently opened *Sweeney Todd*.

The present Broadway musical crop includes seven long runs with *Grease* taking the longevity prize and the quality award shared by *A Chorus Line* and *Ain't Misbehavin'* the Fats Waller revue.

A summary of this season's offerings: *Sarava* (based on the film *Donna Flora and Her Two Husbands*, set in Brazil, musical debut of rising young actress Tovah Feldshuh), *They're Playing Our Song* (Neil Simon's two character musical based on real life relationship of its composer and lyricist, Marvin Hamlisch and Carole Bayer Sager, auspicious debut of Luci Arnaz, daughter of Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz) *Whoopee* (revival of 1928 musical that originally starred Eddie Cantor) *Zoot Suit* (musical play, based on 1940's Chicano gangs in Los Angeles), *Carmelina* (score by Burton Lane and lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner, featuring Georgia Brown).

Already *Sarava* and *Zoot Suit* are struggling and may join this season's grave yard. Musicals already interred there are *King of Hearts*, *Platinum* (despite Alexis Smith's considerable presence), and Jerry Herman's *The Grand Tour* with Joel Grey. But the principal casualty was Michael Bennett's *Ballroom*. It fitted remarkable choreography to a common place story, had a star performance by Dorothy Loudon, and was certainly superior to Broadway's average fare.

The demise of *Ballroom* fills one with foreboding. The sight of Michael Bennett, the fabulously talented creator of *A Chorus Line* licking his wounds and losing a cool two million of his own funds, does not auger well. *Ballroom's* failure to find an audience while such mediocre material as *I Love My Wife* and *Annie* flourish, points up a disturbing trend. The Broadway musical has become the province of an audience of TV watchers, not theatre-goers, with the limitations of television being imposed and glorified on the Broadway stage. As illustration of this, no new Broadway musical would now dare open without a blitzkreig of television advertising.

This makes the emergence of Stephen Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd* an even greater cause for celebration. In no way, is it safe, light or limited instead all is dark and excessive. The story of the Demon Barber of Fleet Street sent unjustly to Australia as a prisoner, who returns to London to murder his enemies and have them made into mince pies, is new to American audiences. While Hugh Wheeler's book strives for an importance it never achieves, Sondheim's music stretches the vocabulary of the Broadway musical. The dazzling score (twenty five songs) is often "operatic", but also encompasses musical hall songs and street ballads. And always there are the Sondheim's suitably razor sharp lyrics. Harold Prince's staging on Eugene Lee's huge architectural set is inventive and ambitious, though Prince's touch can be excessive as in the copious bloodletting that literally flows on stage. The show's reach does exceed its grasp, but then what's a Broadway for? Len Cariou, a classic actor who has become a musical star, is effective as the demented Todd, and Angela Lansbury reaches new heights as a musical performer. She dances, sings and acts dauntingly difficult material with ease and vigour.

While *Sweeney Todd's* parts might not make a completely satisfactory total it is always inventive provocative and often hauntingly spectacular. Here is a landmark musical that overwhelms not only its audience but also every other Broadway musical of this season or any recent seasons.

Angela Lansbury in Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd* Photo: Martha Swope

Alex Buzo has for many years been one of our major playwrights. His work has always been controversial — even to obscenity cases with *Norm and Ahmed*. He has been resident playwright at the MTC and won the Australian Literary Society's gold medal in 1972. Here he writes of the production of his latest work *Makassar Reef* in America.

# Alexander Buzo

## MR BROWN GOES TO WASHINGTON

My play *Makassar Reef* was staged last year by the ACT Theatre in Seattle, Washington Since my return people have asked me "what was it like?" — a nice change from the most asked question after my first American production, *Rooted* in 1972 ("I suppose you had to change it, did you?") I will now try to answer the first question the answer to the second being as always no

### Scene Setting

Seattle is on the upper West Coast of the U.S., near the border with Canada, and it is normally powdered with very fine rain that wavers in from the sea across the sounds and lakes and finishes up on the fir forests in the hills Yet despite this the people are cheerful and happy to be in Seattle Predictably, the only grouch I met was an appalling psychiatrist

ACT (stands for A Contemporary Theatre) is a professional repertory theatre and like Nimrod, has a repertoire consisting of mainly contemporary plays plus one Shakespeare a year

The Artistic Director of ACT, Greg Falls, has been vaguely interested in producing *Martello Towers* but was more definite when it came to *Makassar Reef* He bought the American rights and signed Bill Ludel, a young New York director and letter writer, to stage the play

### The Director

Bill Ludel a 1973 graduate of the Yale School of Drama, was influenced mostly by Sanford Meisner's theories of acting Meisner holds that intentions are the most important part of a dramatic character and the actor should dig them out The actor begins each scene with an intention that is then affected by events and other characters Changes in intention are dramatically plotted

Most American acting is governed by one of these sub Stanislavkian methods and their forte is psychological realism Shakespeare is invariably mangled by American actors but Chekhov, with his flaky dialogue and subterranean strength, is normally done to the hilt Above all it works for Miller William and speeded up to embrace the surrealism of the writing, for Rabe and Mamet

That the method has changed American acting for the better is I think indisputable to compare the dreadful pre method film *Knock on any Door* (1949) with the post method *On The Waterfront* (1954 is cruel but necessary Method fanatics would also have you believe that the

Alexander Buzo

visiting American production of *Golden Boy* in London before World War II led the way for the emergence in the 1950s of Finney, Tushingham, Hagh and co

Stanford Meisner emphasises inner life and through lines and so most of Bill Ludel's 248 questions to me concerned what happens to the characters off-stage The most difficult transition was the scene break in Act 2 [page 65 in the Currency Press edition]

### Lindsay Anderson Refuted

Hemingway's dictum that a writer should only leave out what he knows has always seemed to me to apply more to playwriting than to the novel Playwrights have much more obvious gaps in their work than novelists, and if they don't think through what happens off stage then their work will immediately collapse In this context I disagree with Lindsay Anderson's statement

> A playwright who is a novelist or story writer tends to produce characters in a play who are totally and fully rounded who exist as it were almost without dialogue whereas a purely "theatrical" playwright creates his characters more in terms of the situation in which they find themselves once they get on to the stage Which is the great difference between Chekhov or Storey and a "theatrical" writer like Noel Coward
>
> *Plays and Players*, December 1975

A "theatrical" writer is under greater pressure, I think, to present a character's off-stage life and no play, however frivolous can survive without this homework In Seattle I was rather glad I had done my homework

### Taking The Trip

Bill Ludel's 248 questions (by mail) were duly answered all requests to change colloquialisms were turned down, and then I went to Seattle via Vancouver, reflecting that at least with a play set in Indonesia there wouldn't be any of the "My Gard I'm so disillusioned I thot Arstralia would be like the U S in 1945" element that I got in Washington with *Tom*.

It's essential for Australian playwrights to be there, even if it's just to wander around answering questions ("How did Beth get disinfectant to Perry's prison?") or giving translations ("gone a million", "straight up and down the wicket", " auburn moment") or wincing at the titles given to sections of the play ("Burglary, Busted Bust and Broken Date") In this case it was one of the most enjoyable rehearsal periods I have ever spent.

Although unsparing in their questions none of the cast are fanatics about the method not at all like the fabled young devotee who was in the cast of *Becket* with Laurence Olivier in New York On opening night, according to legend, Olivier entered and dried "Quick! What's my line?" he hissed at the Methodist "I don't work that way," was the unhelpful answer

### Physical Fitness

Do American actors physicalise because their voices are bad, or are their voices bad because they concentrate on physicalising? Only one thing is certain, they don't just stand and deliver, in the English tradition Tanny McDonald who played Beth Fleetwood, was trained by Uta Hagen who emphasises props as one of the best means of revealing character Accordingly Beth's hat and sun-cream got a thorough work out although come to think of it so did Sandy Gore's in the Melbourne Theatre Company production

Denis Arndt, who played Weeks Brown, turned the hotel bedroom into a physical representation of the character — sensuality in the cage, monsters in the bathroom, relief in the refrigerator, disgust in the sink, weakness in the knee, responsibility outside the door and in the telegram

The preparation of his chief prop, a thermos, was lovingly rehearsed Fifty lemons were

Ruben Sierra (Karim), Erik Frederiksen (Perry) and Tanny McDonald (Beth) in the Washington *Makassar Reef*. Photo: Chris Bennion

squashed in the cause, and it worked beautifully. The gin, the tonic, the lemon, the ice, the juggled cigarette, the burnt telegram, the exploding power point — he went over them time and again till he was perfect.

## The Set

Karen Gjelsteen designed a set that was beautiful to look at, to feel, and to walk around in. There was no satire, no ducks on the wall, no ugliness. There was bamboo and cane and shutters and gold light with slatted shadows and palms and fans and neat water under the jetty which echoed magically when Barbara Tarbuck, playing Wendy, rippled her toes across the surface.

It was a romantic set for a romantic play but it also had a strong sense of territory and atmosphere and above all unity. Like Tony Tripp's magnificent set for the MTC production you didn't get a three sets-in one transposed TV play feeling from it.

## The Accents

American actors can't do Australian accents. The closest I ever heard was Barbara Caruso in *Rooted*, who practised with a cassette player for weeks, but the other four in that cast ranged from New Jersey to Elephant and Castle. Eventually we settled on international stage English and I taught them how to pronounce key words.

This method also worked well in *Tom* where we ended up, including me, with convincing mid Pacific accents.

In Seattle there was one problem. I had written to Bill Ludel that international stage English was the best way out, but when I arrived I found Tanny McDonald doing an Irene Handl job. Tanny wasn't ideal casting, and she knew it, but this voice made it worse. Her ear had detected a longer a in the Australian accent, but she gave it too much. "Frustraaaaaation," she said, and it sounded wrong. Beth wasn't an old tart.

This is the crux of the problem. Australian vowels and diphthongs are fractionally longer than American ones. Greg Falls explained to me that it's hard for actors to render fractions like that. They hold on a second too long, and the accent jumps over to England. To my mind, mid Pacific is best.

## Opening

It was almost an anti-climax to open after such a great rehearsal period, but we did, and I found the audience reaction very similar to Melbourne. The well wishers in the foyer were as numerous after the play as before — always a good sign in America. Elliot Norton flew over from Boston and gave the play ACT. Bill Ludel and Barbara Tarbuck a lovely wrap. The girls who work in the theatre were bowled over by the Weeks/Wendy scenes, which were beautifully, lovingly rendered. John Kauffman's haunted, neutral Abidin rightly won wraps for this brilliant American Indian actor. Barbara Tarbuck was every bit as good as Monica Maughan and Monica Maughan has never met Sanford Meisner. And so it went.

## Homage to Catatonia

It was a great time in Seattle and great production but let's not forget the opposition.

A few locals of the social worker mentality expressed disappointment to me that the play wasn't about a poor Mexican girl's abortion or child abuse among black whales, but I suggested to these genital pseuds that that kind of middle class opium was on television every night, brought to the screen by hard hitting Volvo-driving reporters. "What's the point of reproducing television in the theatre?" I asked. "Besides, those programmes are neither art nor entertainment, nor do they have anything to say about the division of wealth."

They seemed surprised by this, but you could tell they didn't think *Makassar Reef* made a strong enough "social statement". I looked carefully for Volvos before crossing the street the next day.

## Shock Ending

Tragedy lay ahead, in the form of a panning in Sydney by gossip writers Diana Fisher and Laurence Rowe in the social pages of the *Sunday Telegraph* but in these last few precious months before the axe life seemed livable and the Californian wine was free.

## Statistics

For the statisticians, here are some facts and figures, compiled with the help of ACT General Manager Andy (4 4) Witt. *Makassar Reef* played to 91% of capacity.

The previous play *The Sea Horse* an *American* play, played to 78% (bitch bitch).

of 12 reviews, 7 were favourable, 3 mixed, 2 unfavourable.

P. Cameron De Vore is on the Advisory Council of ACT.

ACT seats 421, and is three quarters in the round.

There is not one mention of East Timor in *Makassar Reef*.

The Seattle/Tacoma area has a population of 3 million.

It has two Equity theatres, ACT and the Seattle Rep.

*Makassar Reef* was given ACT's standard four week season.

The play has not been performed in Makassar, Surabaya, or Adelaide.

Barbara Tarbuck (Wendy) and Denis Arnot (Weeks). Photo: Chris Bennion


Children's Theatre: A series to mark The International Year of the Child.

SHOPFRONT is one of the most exciting theatres for young people in the country doing everything from young playwrights' weekends to total theatre events.
ERROL BRAY (Shopfront Director)

# Processes & Product

Young people creating their own plays and re creating their own lives — this is the basis of playbuilding and the basis of most arts work done at Shopfront This approach developed out of my experiences working with kids in the inner-city and has been refined and developed during three years at Shopfront in the work of a number of tutors and group leaders The play building approach emphasises process but also works towards specific goals, eg creation of a play This process encourages young people to make statements about their lives and interests in improvised scenes. The plays are usually thematic rather than plot based It is this process that produces the starting moments of insight that Shopfront plays have The kids involved in playbuilding immediately come to grips with their creative abilities and with the real material of drama They are immediately involved in creating scenes and characters, in dealing with ideas and the expression and communication of ideas Playbuilding is about making the art form of theatre available to every kid as an expressive and communicative medium

Shopfront acting and production styles tend to be very Brechtian, very much demonstrating the action rather than "living" it The Shopfront experience confirms that this style is more natural and accessible to young people The mystique terms used by many drama teachers — like absorption, awareness growth, imagination enrichment, emotional harmony — put a block on the development of personal creativity and tend to encourage an introspective approach to drama, an approach where all criticism of the work done is irrelevant and where "meaning" becomes a dirty word The Shopfront process develops personal qualities from need, not teacher enforcement If kids want to achieve their goals — creating a play, showing a play — they come to realise that discipline and control are necessary and must come from within them A lot of youth theatre lacks kid inventiveness mainly because adults interfere with the work too much at the wrong times, in the wrong places

The fact that Shopfront has had an established base and community involvement over the past three years has allowed for intense


development and refinement of our work both in depth and breadth The breadth is very obvious We began doing strong but "bare" plays — just the actors and their play This approach is still basic to our work to keep communication simple and direct but the kids have been able to indulge their other arts interests and expand their areas of interest as we progressed as a youth theatre and also procured a wonderful theatre space/resource Murals, puppetry, dance, mime writing, set-making, costuming, lighting and sound control stage management, front-of house, video and radio — all are thriving interests of the kids Music workshops, photography (from snapping to processing), mask-making, silk-screening and even sculpture have been offered in successful workshops that are now continuing Kids know no arts boundaries and most try a variety of workshops here

The breadth of work done at Shopfront also opens up a whole range of possibilities for development of work in depth Having our own space — a space available full time for the creative work of young people — has enabled tutors and kids to follow through projects over a significant period of time and learn together, refining and re-shaping the work, trying it out with different groups of kids so that new perspectives are gained continually so that processes can occur and be developed within individual projects as well as over the whole Shopfront process

An excellent example of a long term development at Shopfront can be seen in the current TIE play out Touring Company is presenting in High Schools, *The Playground Play* It is a controversial and confronting Kids Lib play that raises many questions about the way kids are treated in our society and opens out directly into discussion of the issues with its audience It was first produced in 1976 by a group of 16 young people working with myself as dramaturg and director It was based on written and improvised scenes done by the group, built into a one hour play designed for performance in a kindergarten playground using the playground equipment as a set

The play was revived in 1978 as *The Playground Re Play* None of the original cast was allowed to be in it we wanted different viewpoints on the material With a cast of ten it was performed in a very theatrical context and a number of scenes were deleted and several new ones created during the rehearsal/playbuilding process Discussions with the audiences after each performance became a feature of the production By this time the play had attracted a lot of attention The ABC had done a radio programme on the first production and it had performed at Canberra Children's Theatre and outdoors at the Sydney Opera House, exciting experience for the cast The second production went to Adelaide for the INSEA Conference and was acclaimed by professional writers attending the 1978 National Young Playwrights' Weekend

It became the 1979 Touring Company play because the 5 young actors in the Company chose it as a statement they wanted to make to other young people and as a particularly relevant piece for the International Year of the Child The 1979 version is more highly rehearsed and more taut in structure than earlier versions An invitation has been made for it to

visit the International Festival of Children's Theatres in London in October — if someone will give us the air fares — and ABC television is recording it for a young people's programme

Again, for the 1979 version, new scenes were added, some old ones dropped, some changes of emphasis occurred Naturally alterations were needed simply to cope with a cast of 5 now doing a play that originally had 16 cast members We also wanted to lead straight into discussion with audiences so we avoided a defined ending So many discussions held after TIF performances are off the point and lazy — a way for students to stay out of class longer, a duty for actors because that's what's supposed to be done We were determined to avoid this and, judging from the response so far in schools, we have succeeded Our company is aged 15 to 17 — all having left school at the end of 1978 — so they are talking to and with their peers Discussion in some schools has lasted over an hour and teachers join in very positively The scenes of the play are now very sharply to the point and strike strong responses from audiences because they have been created refined and tested against the experience and judgement of over 50 kids who were and are active in drama and playbuilding, and helped create this play

Already we can see the 1980 or 81 TIF play in our current playbuilding creation, *Childmyth*, which is a celebratory look at the legends history and myths surrounding childhood Many of our plays have examined the problem areas of childhood asked essential questions and tried to jolt the conscience of our manipulated society It has seemed an inevitable process to move towards celebration of the strengths of youth and towards creating "newmyths" — a central part of our *Childmyth* playbuilding But the celebration of strength and the new myth of kids has been present in our work all along — if not stated as a dramatic theme — due to the very fact that Shopfront kids were creating their own work with their own voices about their own lives

This development in depth is now occuring at Shopfront over the broad spectrum of activity — not just with playbuilding — and underlines the necessity for this place to continue its existence Many areas of work begun as interesting workshops for a few kids have taken strong and individual directions within the overall Shopfront process. Puppetry, mime, dance, photography, video and radio, all fall into this category After just 3 years of operations and 2 years in our own space Shopfront has a pulse and clarity about its work that is recognised and commented on by all visitors Our openness to new ideas and new workers is part of our strength and the continuing awareness by all here that having our own space has allowed and will allow the sort of experiment and development in youth theatre only thought possible for avant-garde adult theatres has given a Shopfront character to all the work we do without detracting from the input of individuals

It may not be far fetched to suggest that Shopfront is the most experimental theatre in Sydney Certainly when John and Sue Fox were able to turn Shopfront into a "ghost train" after a week of intensive workshops here many people commented that no other theatre in Sydney could offer the flexibility for such a project to happen Our experiment however comes out of an approach to drama and the arts centred on the basic, bare elements of each art form, eg in drama the actor, his mind his body and a "shaper" or leader or guide The approach in drama is largely Brechtian and is community based We are an amateur theatre in the best sense of the word, a theatre speaking for its community through the voices of its children The fact that no-one else seems to be allowing children to speak for themselves effectively through the arts has attracted national and even international attention to the processes and products of Shopfront

The Shopfront Theatre.

# Romeo and Juliet, Paul Bunyan and an excellent Mikado

With the Australian Opera occupied in staging revivals in Melbourne and then taking a well earned breather to prepare for no less than six openings in Sydney and Melbourne between May 21 and June 20, operatic centre stage was occupied by the lesser companies in Sydney and Canberra during the month under review

Two brief seasons by suburban entrepreneurs were seen in Sydney, and Canberra Opera came up with a moderately successful realisation of Gounod's *Romeo and Juliet* starring Howard Spicer and Fran Bosly in the title roles

It is a good deal easier to see why this opera has fallen into neglect, in recent year than to account for the fact that it was an instantaneous success when it was first performed in 1867 and for some time thereafer was considerably more popular than the *Faust* through which Gounod's name primarily lives on today

*Romeo and Juliet* has little snappy action and few memorable tunes apart from the big duet between the lovers which is of sufficient quality to merit regular performance in the concert hall and on record Long stretches are totally unmemorable and just about devoid of stage action

Given such considerable inbuilt handicaps to contend with, the Canberra designer and producer, James Ridewood and Terence Clarke, did quite well in their realisation of *Romeo and Juliet* After a rather shaky start, they were assisted by a most competent orchestral contribution under the baton of Richard McIntyre, and some superb chorus work, particularly in the vocal department

Indeed Canberra Opera has been able to show consistent, if gradual improvement in this area until it can now be relied upon to field a most satisfying contingent of choristers for any major production They handled their major test in *Romeo and Juliet*, the choral prologue with great success Predictably, they had less success in coping with the dramatic demands of the piece, but even in this area there has been marked emprovement over some of their efforts of a few years back On this occasion, though they could have used more positive and firm direction from Clarke they were inclined to lounge about here and there rather than act — individually and collectively

Phil Perman (Tybalt) Michael Whittaker (Paris) and Bryan Dowling (Friar Laurence) all turned in creditable performances in supporting roles although Margaret Sim's superb if brief, solo innings as Romeo's page Stephano lingers firmly in my mind as a highlight of the evening But more than most operas, *Romeo and Juliet* (like the original Shakespeare play) depends on the effectiveness of those who play the title roles.

Howard Spicer and Cynthia Shneider in *Paul Bunyan* at NSW Opera

Fran Bosly was a very good Juliet, though suffering from the chronic problem of all Juliets, that if one can sing it (or act it, in the context of the original play) one is almost by definition too mature to be credible as a 13 year-old girl.

Nevertheless, the undeniable personal triumph of this Canberra production was Howard Spicer s portrayal of Romeo He is young and dashing enough to be a convincing romantic hero, convincingly gladiatorial when required and mature enough to be credible in the final conscious decision to die for love And furthermore he turned in a most creditable vocal performance — not impeccable as to detail (though what performance, in the final analysis, is?), but blessed with a liberal smattering of that white, semi nasal lyricism that French opera demands even though it may be being sung in English at the moment

I first encountered Spicer a year or so ago in a suburban Sydney classroom in his much publicised alter-ego of the time Big H the B flat Bike — making his entrance on a motorbike, wearing a leather jacket, aggressively setting out, to prove that opera is not a sissy sport Admittedly, old images and prejudices do die very hard, but I could not escape the feeling that Big H in this context was doing battle with a paper tiger rather than an opponent that really needed to be taken seriously, and I could not help wondering that such an obvious tenor talent should be devoted to such an enterprise

A lot of water has flowed under Spicer's professional bridge since then, including an also much publicised burning of his bike by vandals at Sydney's Kings Cross, and it is good to see him developing a career for himself higher on the ramparts of the Australian opera world Full marks for his obvious interest in evangelising his art form where it matters most for the medium term future — in the schools, but there can be no sense of regret that he now seems to have left this phase of his career behind, although he was scheduled to present another king of opera evangelising at the Sydney Opera House late last month

Spicer retains apparently, a rather refreshing catholicity of interest in the musical theatre that is lacking in many opera singers a very few weeks after I encountered him as Romeo in Canberra, I again ran into him in an important role in a very different work — Benjamin Britten's *Paul Bunyan* It was the Australian premiere season of this extraordinary work that dates from 1941, when Britten was apparently considering seriously settling in America

Roger Covell's University of New South Wales Opera presented the work for a brief season at the science theatre, and deserves full marks for doing so even if it is easy to understand, having seen it, why Britten withdrew it soon after its first performance and it has mouldered in limbo ever since Britten called it an operetta, but there is so little action and so much choral commentary (mostly delivered in this production, from bleachers set up on stage facing the audience) that it would be more correctly labelled a secular oratorio or cantata, with declaimed dialogue

As a long-standing opera lover ever more

enchanted by Britten's stage works in recent years and an American brought up on the colourful legend of Bunyan the lumberjack of superhuman proportions capable of all sorts of bizarre and impossible feats, I approached this work with keen anticipation — and emerged thoroughly disoriented, and perplexed. This piece embodies neither the Britten I know and love nor the Paul Bunyan I know and love.

Despite its impeccable parental pedigree with music by a major composer to a text by a major poet, W H Auden, it is mostly fatuous and over inflated both musically and textually. Bunyan himself is a disembodied voice (spoken nicely enough into an offstage microphone, in this production, by John Gaden), and it is hard for a character who is never actually seen on stage to convey a very colourful image particularly when given such a pompus collection of lines. Inevitably, he comes across rather more like the disembodied voice of God than the very real, flesh and blood powerfully built giant of the North American forest he is in the original myth.

Indeed the whole text is riddled with the symbolism of apple-pie America: patriotic as all get-out oozing the evangelistic democracy, self conscious wholesomeness, clean-cut oversimplified goodness that are so characteristic of the American musicals of the 40s and 50s. There are even moments when the casual cash customer could be excused for wondering if he had not perhaps wandered into some newly discovered Rodgers and Hammerstein opus, or perhaps a scene cut from *Oklahoma!* at the very last moment before its Broadway opening.

There are others particularly when in this production domestic "animals" pop up through the stage floor, that are uncannily reminiscent of Janacek's *Cunning Little Vixen* both visually and musically. But there are plenty of others when the great Britten that was to be a few years after the composition of *Paul Bunyan* unmistakably manifests himself.

Regardless of what one calls it, *Paul Bunyan* is unequivocally an ensemble piece, choral and instrumental, and as such was admirably suited to the capabilities of the University of New South Wales Opera. The solo bits were capably handled, by and large, but there was no real hope of establishing any very high level of continuing dramatic credibility within the claustrophobic inbuilt confines of the work itself. Finally, one must commend Covell's group for providing us with the long-overdue local premiere of this immature work by one of the great musical talents of the 20th century, but at the same time concede that *Paul Bunyan* well deserves the oblivion to which it has already just about been consigned by the performing groups of the world.

In a month otherwise devoted to little known works, Sydney's suburban Rockdale Municipal Opera Company launched its 1979 season with a production of Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado* which was well worth taking the trouble to go and view.

Production, orchestral playing and chorus work were all considerably more taut and effective than in some of the recent efforts of this historical company which predates even the direct ancestor of the Australian Opera, the Elizabethan Trust Opera Company; and the public response was excellent to the extent that virtually every seat during the four night season was sold and a handful of prospective patrons turned away at the door.

There was a smattering of new and semi-new faces among the core of old-time Rockdale and G and S Society principals and the result was generally quite excellent. John Wirth's Nanki Poo was as sunny, despondent and romantic as required in turn, Mary Blake's Katisha missed no Gilbertian wit in the spoken dialogue even if one could have wished for more vocal power in some of the singing.

John Colditz was an extraordinarily fierce looking Mikado, with some of the most grotesque face makeup I have ever seen. Patrick Donnelly was a good Pooh Bah who was not quite overblown and pompous enough to do full justice to the part.

Jeni Martin's Yum Yum was the epitome of the sweet young thing: perfectly petite to look at, exquisitely minaturised in the acting department, but a trifle too small of voice to be heard clearly even in the relatively constricted confines of Rockdale Town Hall.

David Goddard's Ko Ko was excellent, from his topically updated Little List to his gruesomely effective mock-beheading of Nanki Poo (which reduced one child in the audience to shrieks) to his scampering up a rope at the side of the proscenium arch to deliver that classic line to Katisha who has been advancing at him like a dreadnought across the stage: "Shrink not from me."

He also has the ability to get out the lightning fast, tongue twisting lyrics required of the little man who sings the patter songs, coupled with more than enough musicality to make him a most promising contender for the mantle formerly worn so firmly on the Sydney suburban circuit by Robert Hatherley.

It almost goes without saying that this *Mikado* was an all round triumph for producer Brian Phillips and musical director Cedric Ashton and a welcome return to the satisfying standard of all round Rockdale competence seen in the past — hopefully proving that the drop in standards last year was an aberration that will not continue to afflict the work of the company in 1979.

Rockdale's next offering will be another operetta: Offenbach's *La Belle Helene* in late July, and it will conclude its 1979 season with four performances of Puccini's *Tosca* in November.

# RUMOURS — engrossing, diverting, chastening

Would Graham Murphy s new production for the Dance Company *Rumours* loose anything when performed in any other city than Sydney?

When I first saw the work at last year s Ballet Festival I felt that some of the references within *Rumours 2* "Lady Jane Beach' were far too specific to a certain place and time to make the social comment relevant to anywhere else in the world Now seeing that section in perspective with the other two acts of the work I think it could be just as feasible anywhere Certainly the people and events on Lady Jane Beach are not peculiar and particular to that place, such things go on at Maslin s Beach in Adelaide and any other sort of nude beach (or even clothed beach for that matter) anywhere in Australia And *Rumours 3* with its derelicts old people and the faceless young is just as much a subject for concern anywhere in the world

It strikes me that what makes for the greatest reference to Sydney per se are the sets and back drops of Alan Oldfield, take away the cliff face and step ladders of Lady Jane or the towering monoliths of the Sydney skyline in the distance in *Rumours 3* and you have a series of tableaux that could apply anywhere It is the sets et al that make for specifics in *Rumours*, the dance as such is not so tied down, even though Mr Murphy may wish it otherwise

Yet in *Rumours I* we have a feeling and flow of choreography that act as a definite glimpse of a certain aspect of the Harbour City *Rumours I* entitled "Weekend daydreaming" opens with the chattering cast rising up out of the cavernous Drama Theatre orchestra pit and spilling out onto the stage, full of exploration and expectation Here is a brilliant image of the masses of city fodder riding down in the elevator and rushing through the streets to get home and start the long awaited weekend, if not with Dionysiac revelry then at least with the glee of small children let loose in a sand pit

The black borders of the stage fly away and there is Oldfield's backdrop of multicoloured spinnakers skimming over the waters of the Harbour This too does much of the anchoring of the work as a whole in a specific reference When the cast undulates on and off, lilting through the twenty minutes duration with arching leaps and easy catches, and in the symmetrical lines of dancers clothed in soft pastel billowing gowns we get an image of yachts lined up in competition, and the general feeling of airiness accumulates as the girls are gently skimmed along on their bottoms across the stage and the men soar across in easy jetés

More definite images follow, yellow, pink and blue costumed men with knee pads come on stage and take up position, a battery of lights fall from the flies and nearly blind the audience and oh, look Merv! Night time cricket! Then there's a tennis match ditto and so on

What is important here is a feeling of relaxation, exhilaration and freedom Murphy's choreography catches it superbly in a paean of praise to innocent hedonism and Sydneysiders take their hedonism very seriously It is amiable here, the tone deepens in the other two acts, but *Rumours I* acts as a prelude, to serve as an aura of beauty that is the harbour on a clear sunny day and the easy, fun times of the ritual of Saddee night

*Rumours 2* "Bare facts and fantasies' set on Lady Jane, continues in its opening moments that same amiability The spotlight travels along the cliff face, illuminating various faces peering out of the bushes and then spreads out into dazzling light as the nude beach personnel

Janet Vernon as the Modest Girl from the Heat Sequence from the Lady Jane beach in *Rumours II* Photo Branco Gaica

clamber down the steps and prepare for a day in the sun The various types and kinds of society here examined are a veritable modern day Ship of Fools There are the young lovers, the trendy married couple, the posing gays, the voyeurs and the young day dreaming maiden

*Rumours 2* is emblematic of types to be found anywhere, what it does is intensify them and exhibit them, but doesn't judge them Murphy is saying that even stark naked we don't leave behind our hang ups, worries or poses, this stylish nudity is just as much a social ruse as dressing up to the nines

There is no community feeling here, just a cross section of people, the lovers are stiff lost to the rest of the world in their mutual self containment, the trendies smoke their grass and jog theatrically up and down the sand, pudenda flapping in the breeze the voyeur lurks about behind a paper not so surreptitiously leering at the bare bods on show, and the fat lady waddles about as sure of herself as Fawcett Majors

What is most intriguing is the fact that Murphy has captured perfectly the feeling of the heat and lethargy of Lady Jane The stage lights are lowered to within inches of the boards and the cast flip over to bake the other side But there is also a certain indolence of mind as well one girl with a transistor gets up and jives about and the other girls join in, they reach the level of a chorus line number for a while but it fades away and the folk dissipate to go back to sun baking. A team of boys start in with a towel fight, but that too only lasts a few seconds as nobody is watching them and neither do they care

The climax of this section (if it could properly be called that) is the erotic day dreaming of the young maiden half heartedly knitting — she ambles around and is set upon by the boys, tossed around casually and without much ceremony she is ganged banged, but she rises up out of the mass of humping backsides still knitting, and goes back to her place

It is all half real, half phantasmagoric, *Lady Jane* is part idealised haven and part social microscope slide There is no real beginning or end and no real climax, the feeling of lethargy and indolence predominate — an indolence of mind as much as matter

It is this facet that is most intriguingly tackled in *Rumours 3* "Last Dreams" Here we get a glimpse of the lower depths of what would seem to be Woolloomooloo, to judge from the aspect of Oldfield's designs The Sydney skyline shimmers in the distance like some promised city while in the foreground are the red tiled roofs of suburbia that blight Sydney like an eczema If one was of a romantic disposition one could also liken these pointed roofs to the pyramids, bastions of time and old age, for it is the old, decrepit, frail and forgotten that populate this side of the city, huddled together in the streets yet with a greater sense of community than any of the smart set of Lady Jane

This is the most difficult and problematical sequence in *Rumours* as a whole, yet a signal achievement for the dancers in the company who adapt themselves adequately and convincingly portray the old and feeble in an excellent example of the ensemble that Murphy has helped shape They don't really do much "dancing" of course these old folk they totter more than dance, they sway and fall, and stand about under the street lights and cart some of their kind off to the ambulance

Again things are general here, and emblematic but the second part of this scene continues with one couple in particular, an old married couple danced by Robert Olup and Graeme Murphy himself Don't ask me why Murphy decided to dance the part of the old woman himself perhaps he thought that he could more naturally convey the movements and mannerisms of an old woman than a young woman could or perhaps, if some of the reviewers are to be believed, he was making some veiled comment about innate Australian sexism Personally I tend to think he did it because what was needed was a performer strong enough to carry and support Olup in some of the dancing which the females in the company would find hard to do

For the old woman here supports and carries her husband as much as he does her, more so in fact She lifts him when he falls and supports him when he staggers It is a genuinely moving and finely choreographed duet of mutual dependence and more so here, I think Murphy *is* making a comment about the sexes in Australia Perhaps he sees the woman (the Australian woman) as stronger, more supportive and resilient than the Australian male Perhaps the Oz male is more dependent on his woman in terms of ego and self assertion than he himself would admit But anyway it is all innate and covert, never obvious, and that itself is a mirror of the situation in this country

But for all their love and dependence, these two old folk still remember with regret and yet affection their youth, when he was a soldier going off to the war and she was his beloved. Images and roles weren't so blurred then, despite how arbitrarily imposed they may have been, and the memory of those days of youth and vigour are as clear to these pensioners now as the day they happened

As the final clincher the two couples dance together in a double duet One notices how the same shapes and choreography change in method and interpretation from the younger to the older couple, but one has to be quick to notice it it is there but it is subtle and takes about one minute to make its poignant point A playwright would take hours to say exactly the same thing and still not achieve the clarity of Murphy's image — in things like this dance is the superior form of expression

If this harrowing scene were not enough, the work as a whole closes with a succinct (if rather bald) example of the difference between youth and age in the present day The young come on stage with a portable television one each, until there is a line of them onstage With the faceless young visibly atrophying in front of them the older couple go up to them enquiringly, but the young fall back and bounce up again in front of the blank TV screens without even a sign of recognition no one says "hello in there" in this world

The final image for the evening is of the entire cast reassembled on that orchestra pit descending quietly into some collective obliteration away from the audience's gaze and leaving not a trace behind It is the end to a very engrossing divertimg and chastening event in the Australian theatre

Christopher Morley, Graeme Watson and Ross Philip in the Night Cricket Sequence from *Rumours I*. Photo Branco Gaica

# WA BALLET — higher performance standards than ever before.

Garth Welch's *Sur Le Balcon* — WA Ballet Photo: Bill Angove.

**The new-look WA Ballet Company presented a very attractive programme of three works new to Perth audiences at the April Playhouse season.**

The opening piece, *Sur Le Balcon*, was a beguiling mix of popular ballet ingredients — familiar Chopin music, a romantic setting, elegant neo-classicism. Choreographer Garth Welch, the Company's Associate Director for the first part of 1979, crafted his writing to explore the varying skills of the ten dancers, and he has given the Company a work which should gain friends for dance wherever it goes. Injury to one of the dancers caused last minute re-writing for this season, and I look forward to seeing the work in its original version presented in a more suitable setting than was offered by the mean, cramped Playhouse stage.

The second work came from Chrissie Parrott, a leading dancer with the Company. She spent 1978 studying choreography in Sydney, and she seems to have learnt well. Breughel's painting, "The Peasant Wedding" is the source of her amusing piece *Catherine's wedding...it should have been Rosie's!* Her mixture of Renaissance music and "modern" dance styles worked well for the most part, and she was clever enough to give the piece a comic hero — Rhys Martin's marvellous village idiot — who the audience can always delight in if their appreciation of the dance falters. It's a work which will get richer as the young dancers develop their theatrical skills and their range of expression outside their accustomed classical norms.

Jonathan Taylor's witty and macabre piece, *Listen to the Music*, was first seen in Australia by Melbourne audiences a few years ago when he did *Star's End* and this work for Ballet Victoria. It is, of course now part of Australian Dance Theatre's repertoire. The joke's on right from *The Nutcracker* overture which heralds classical glories quite unlike the grotty church hall the rising curtain reveals. A keep fit class of four men and two girls runs and jumps and generally does what it's told by an insufferably right and condescending female voice obviously on loan from *Kindergarten of the Air* — it was the BBC version of this pre-schoolers' favourite which got Mr Taylor started on the idea back in his Rambert days. The voice bores on, blind to the results of her directives which leave a solitary dancer 'being an autumn wind and flying up and away at final curtain. It's comic, full of natty theatre jokes, the audience absolutely loves it, and every ballet company fighting for a popular following should instantly commission Mr Taylor for its twin.

For the first time in some years the WA Ballet Company has enough dancers on contract — ten and in particular enough skilled, personable male dancers to justify optimistic discussions about building a repertoire suited to its State wide performing schedule. Add the three works from this Playhouse season to its roster of good works by Jacqui Carroll, Leigh Warren, Jack Carter, Peter Darrell, Walter Bourke, Marilyn Williams and others, and already an exciting and valuable range of triple bills emerges. With tougher behind-the-scenes control of production components like costume design and lighting, the Company should achieve higher performance standards than ever before in its varied history.

But the question remains. Is there a sizeable metropolitan audience interested in these higher performance standards from the regional dance company? For the WA Ballet Company the next task, and perhaps the hardest of all, is to convince a reasonable proportion of Perth's outer suburbanites that dance is a home grown, round-the-year entertainment and not just a special treat to be organised when the Russians come to town.

# The Distant Lens — serious, sometimes earnest

In the middle of Western Australia's self congratulatory 150th celebrations a tough minded documentary film has emerged which has some interesting things to say about the impact film makers can have on the society in which they live and work *The Distant Lens* is a fifty-minute black and white documentary of the image of Western Australia captured by film makers between the years 1907 and 1947 It attempts to show how the very nature of film and its forms of expression changed during that period

Film began as a bit of a gimmick, a novelty to be wondered at, says the documentary, a record of some of the significant events in the life of the State But the 1940's brought changes with the film work being done by people whose style came from American exemplars, and whose business seemed to be not just to mirror the society they worked in but to shape it, to help it find a sense of identity Locally-produced film drama is featured, and the topical material ranges from the north west camel and donkey trains of the 1920's to the sophisticated' public relations films and newsreels of the late 1940's.

Director Glenda Hambly contributed a great deal to the film, working on the research, scripting and editing. Her months of sifting through State and National Film Archive material have produced arresting and moving images of a tiny isolated white society living in innocence and peace before 1930 The depression and the war changed all that, and with change came the unease, the loss of identity that some historians saw is with us still

Producer, Fred Murphy, with his cast and crew of *Perth's First Photoplay* which he produced in the early 1920's

The documentary's message is a serious, sometimes earnest one and now and then the "ordinariness" of the images seems at odds with the weight and force of the film's arguments. But perhaps that's just the point The gentility which still characterises much of Western Australian society is probably just as much a refuge from reality as it is an honest and positive expression of feeling

The film was produced by the Perth Institute of Film and Television, and The Rural & Industries Bank of Western Australia who are to be congratulated on their "no strings attached' sponsorship The material is Western Australian, but the film's point of view could surely equally be true of other regions of Australia. It has been entered for the Sydney Film Festival, so hopefully there will be an opportunity for denizens of the east to view it and learn a little more about themselves, as well as something about the 'State of Excitement"

**SPOTLIGHT — Continued from page 8.**

'At one stage I thought it would be a very good idea — a way of the Australia Council giving support to people rather that sending them a cheque — for it to go and see newspaper editors and offer to write a big contract for space and allot advertising space to people who were applying for support, because one of the major costs in this business is advertising If those people went and talked to editors and said ' this is the way in which our grants are going to take shape, we think also there should be an interest from you'

"I don't mean in terms of any sort of blackmail, or asking for favours But to talk to the editors and say 'this is what we want to get going' And they could have written big contracts, and they would have got to advertise attraction A, B or C' "

One subject which Hocking could talk about endlessly is Computicket Through the Cleo Laine concerts and the Prospect Theatre Company, Computicket is holding $101 000 of his company's money

'The thing that was not really brought out fully by the press in the Computicket business was that the first thing that any box office does is hold the money on trust for the public until the performance has taken place, and therefore they are acting for the public and the promoter and the perfotmer It was not brought home strongly enough to people that they should be protected as well in the case of things not taking place

"I objected very strongly to Paul Riomfalvy's statement saying that of course there'd be no reason why performances shouldn't take place After all, the promoters and performers were put on the spot by all these lovely statements, and the onus was put on them by Harry Miller's Computicket to have the performances go on '

If there is any select entertainer, little known to the Australian public *you* would like to see tour Australia then Cliff Hocking is the entrepreneur most likely to bring that person out I am doing my best to persuade him to tour Bobby Short here

# Brecht from Eyre Methuen

**Collected Plays Vol 2 I Man Equals Man and The Elephant Calf** by Bertolt Brecht Eyre Methuen ($18 95 rrp)
**Collected Plays Vol 2 II. The Threepenny Opera** by Bertolt Brecht Eyre Methuen $18 95 rrp)
**Diaries 1920-1922** by Bertolt Brecht Eyre Methuen
**The Days of the Commune** by Bertolt Brecht Methuen Modern Play
**The Messingkauf Dialogues** by Bertolt Brecht Methuen Modern Play


When Bertolt Brecht was living in the United States he wrote for American readers a piece called a "Short List of the most frequent common and boring misconceptions about the Epic Theatre" Now, in Australia forty years later, such a list might be almost the same His work is often still dismissed in this country as over intellectual, too overtly political, not "entertaining" enough and anti emotional The later plays such as *Mother Courage* and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* which are often liked, are dismissed as succeeding in spite rather than because of the heavily instructive and didactic purpose which it is thought his theory prescribes

Brecht in fact attacked the notion that learning and thinking are by definition not fun For him this was a bourgeois notion designed to discredit learning. Once you have reached adulthood and therefore acquired the marketable commodity knowledge, it is a threat to your market value to imply that you still have things to learn The real thrust of the idea that learning and entertainment are separate things is to discredit entertainment — by the deliberate suggestion that you can't learn by it 100 000 people at the VFL Final and all of them experts

The latest two plays to be published in the ambitious Methuen *Collected Plays* of Brecht are examples of an earlier madcap, fun loving Brecht *Man Equals Man* (with *The Elephant Calf*) (Vol 2 i) he revised and rewrote many times, but it never lost its early simple farcical energy — in spite of much strengthening of its anti militaristic "message" *Man Equals Man (The Elephant Calf* is an interval piece for the foyer) shows how an innocent harbour porter Galy Gay is stripped and reassembled as a different person — Jip, a soldier — by three soldiers who need him to get them out of trouble. "Last of the personalities", he comes as military and aggressively efficient as the rest of them — for man is just man, with one name or one personality or another The play is very funny, and if things like "The Song of the Flow of Things" seem dangerously thoughtful for modern Australian audiences then "The Song of Widow Begbick's Drinking Truck" should make up for it

*The Threepenny Opera* (Vol 2 ii) is well known in this country, and, as the editors say in the introduction has little to say that is startling about poverty and corrupt business although that is its ostensible subject This is a play which Brecht scarcely revised in spite of his maturation into a better Marxist It remains the exuberant and innocent romp with a hard edge which made for its early and continued success The only pity is that it seems to have supplanted Gay's original in the directorial mind The plays appear as Volumes 2 i and 2 ii of the Methuen *Collected Works* of Brecht They are splendid editions introduced and supplemented by further texts by Brecht and his collaborators, and, with editorial notes The volumes are scarcely over 100 pages each, however, and it is difficult to see why they are separated At $18 95 each they are books for the complete devotee

For the devotee also is Brecht's *Diaries 1920 1922* edited by Herton Ramsthorn and translated and introduced by John Willett The publishers say that the diaries "provide fresh insights into the mind and working methods of a great poet", and this is quite true There are some startling pieces of writing and some fascinating speculations and thoughts about Art and Life For the general reader however, the self indulgence and thoughtlessness of attitude become a little wearing Here is a great writer's youthful thoughts, written with no notion of publication and except for the specialist, it is an embarrassment to read them At 22 his egocentricity leads him into all sorts of racist, dreadfully sexist (even for the Unliberated) and narrow minded attitudes which one can't help thinking he might have liked to have suppressed

In the familiar blue and white covers are two Methuen editions of Brecht's works which have not yet been mentioned in this column *The Days of the Commune* was one of his last plays Economical to the point of austerity it tells the story of the Paris Commune of 1871 — ranging from the citizens of the street fighting at the barricades to the villians Thiers and Bismark who finally have them shot down The subject is so grand and the emotions it arouses so strong that it is hard for this reader anyway, to see it as a drama of ideas about force and means and ends

*The Messingkauf Dialogues* are relatively well known as a statement of Brecht's theoretical ideas They are rambling and drawn out, and yet still incomplete (that is, he had planned much more for them) The impassioned manifesto, or the reasoned essay are more economical and easily accessible ways of communicating ideas but these dialogues still make provocative reading

H G Kippax argued twenty years ago that Brecht's contribution to the theatre ought to be peculiarly suitable to this country and the subjects we want to present on stage And yet we still have a long way to go It has been said that we are temperamentally suited to the looser form of narrative and the incorporation of overtly theatrical playing devices which Brecht's style offers And yet we get bogged down in an endless ritual of surburban middle class living room fantasies happily reassuring ourselves that that is what Australians are "really like" And so we lose the forest for the sake of the trees

All these books (and much else besides) are published by Eyre Methuen a company without which it is impossible to imagine the continued existence of the English speaking theatre

# GUIDE

## A.C.T.

**ANU ARTS CENTRE** (49 4787)
Last Ditch Theatre Company
*What the Butler Saw* by Joe Orton
30 May to 9 June, Wednesday to Saturday
Australian Theatre Workshop
*The Floating World* by John Romeril
Director, Warwick Baxter.
20 to 30 June, Wednesday to Saturday

**CANBERRA THEATRE** (49 7600)
The Australian Ballet *Coppelia*.
2 to 8 June
*The Danny La Rue Show*
9 to 23 June, Monday to Saturday

**PLAYHOUSE** (49-7600)
Canberra Theatre Trust
*Statements* by Athol Fugard with Olive Bodill and Anthony Wheeler.
28 May to 9 June Monday to Saturday
Victorian Arts Council
*Grimms' Grins — Enchanting Tales from the Brothers Grimm* with Paul Karo and Gillian Seamer 27, 28 June

**REID HOUSE THEATRE WORKSHOP** (47-0781)
*Nono's Nose*
*The Empty House*
*A program about roles* (as yet untitled)
Schools in the ACT

**THEATRE 3** (47-4222)
Tempo Theatre
*Oh. What a Lovely War* by the Joan Littlewood Workshop Closes 2 June
Canberra Repertory
*A Handful of Friends* by David Williamson
2 June to 21 July, Thursday to Saturday.

*For entries contact Marguerite Wells on 49-3192*

## NEW SOUTH WALES

**ACTORS COMPANY** (660 2503)
*Under Milkwood* by Dylan Thomas, Director, Rodney Delaney Commences early June

**ALPINE INN** (439 1435)
Willoughby Road, Crows Nest
*The Four of Us* by Rick Maier, Robert and David Lansberry and Malcolm Frawley, Director, Malcolm Frawley, with Steven Sacks, Susan Asquith, Adela St Claire and David Morrell Tuesday-Saturday throughout June

**ARTS COUNCIL OF NEW SOUTH WALES** (357 6611)
School Tours *Blinky Bill*, a children's play for infants and primary, metropolitan area from June 4
*Modern Time Theatre* for infants, primary and secondary; Central West throughout June.
*Sontegara* a renaissance musical ensemble for infants, primary and secondary, Riverina area from June 4
*Dale Woodward* glove puppeteer for infants and primary, North Coast and Hunter areas throughout June
*The Bandels*, world of magic for infants and primary, North West and Hunter areas throughout June
*Dance Concert Ltd* folk dances for infants primary and secondary; South Coast throughout June
Adult Tour *Ballet Mahmbo Latino* Argentinian dancers; South Coast throughout June

**COURT HOUSE HOTEL** (357 4831)
Oxford Street, Taylor Square
*Gidget Goes Down Under* by Rick Maier and Malcolm Frawley, Director, Malcolm Frawley, Music, Sandra Ridgewell; with Kate Brady, Ross Hohnan, Peter Corbett, Stan Pugh and Peter Neale. An Access Theatre Production throughout June on Friday and Saturday

**ENSEMBLE THEATRE** (929 8877)
*Rain* by Somerset Maugham, Director, John Ewing with Helen Morse, Brian Young, Judy Ferris and Norman Kaye Until mid June
*How Sleep the Brave* by Mann, Director, Gary Baxter Commences late June

**FRANK STRAIN'S BULL N' BUSH THEATRE RESTAURANT** (357 4627)
*Thanks for the Memory* A musical review from the turn of the century to today, with Noel Brophy, Barbara Wyndon Garth Meade, Neil Bryant and Helen Loram, Director, George Carden Throughout June

**GENESIAN THEATRE** (827 3023)
*Titus Andronicus* by Shakespeare, Director, Margaret Rieneck with Peter Ryan, Dennis Allen, Peter Hickey, Gaynor Mitchell and Pat East Throughout June.

**HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE** (212 3411)
*Annie*, the musical, Directed by George Martin, with Hayes Gordon, Jill Perryman, Nancye Hayes Ric Hutton, Anne Grigg and Kevin Johns Throughout June

**HUNTER VALLEY THEATRE COMPANY** (049-26 2755)
Civic Playhouse *The Miracle Worker* and *Under Milkwood* in repertory, Director, Ross McGregor To end of June

**KIRRIBILLI PUB THEATRE** (92 1415)
Kirribilli Hotel, Milson's Point.
*The Vampire Show* written by Perry Quinton & John King Director, Perry Quinton with Zoe Bertram, Patrick Ward, Richard Young, Jill Watt & John Volz Continues through June & July.

**LES CURRIE PRESENTATIONS** (358 5676)
*Mike Jackson* traditional bush music Touring infant, primary and secondary schools in Sydney metropolitan area
*Grimms Grins* conceived and directed by Don Mackay with Paul Karo, Gillian Seamer, Robert Forza, Hugh Wade and Jeffrey Hodgson A Victorian Arts Council production for infants and primary touring throughout the State

**MARIAN STREET THEATRE** (498 3166)
*Fanny* the musical, Director, Alastair Duncan with Ray du Parc, Gordon McDougall, Rosalie Fletcher, Peter Cousens, Barbara Farrell, Arthur Pickering and Frank Lloyd Throughout June

**MUSIC HALL THEATRE RESTAURANT** (909 8222)
*Lost to the Devil* written and directed by Stanley Walsh with Ron Haddrick, Alan Wilson and Karen Johnson Throughout June

**MUSIC LOFT THEATRE** (977 6585)
*On Together* written by Hilary Bamberger et al, Director, William Orr, with Lee Young and Ann Emery Throughout June

**NEW THEATRE** (519 3403)
*Richard's Cork Leg* by Behan Director, John Armstrong with Stan Ashmore Smith, Janice Nary, Jon Williams Paul Quinn and Betty Millias Friday, Saturday and Sunday until June 9
*Events while Guarding the Bofors Gun* by McGrath Director, Wayne van Heekeren Commences mid June

**NIMROD THEATRE** (699 5003)
Upstairs *The Sea* by Edward Bond Director, Richard Wherrett, with John Bell, Ruth Cracknell Debbie Baile, Maggie Dence, Julie Hudspeth, Andrew James and Robert van Mackelenberg Until June 10
*The Life of Galileo* by Bertolt Brecht, Director, Ken Horler; with John Gadea. Commences June 27
Downstairs *American Buffalo* by David Mamet, Director Peter Barclay with Graham Rouse, Stanley Walsh and Brandon Burke Until June 17

**ORANGE CIVIC THEATRE** (063-62 1555)
Canberra Opera
*The Marriage of Figaro* by Mozart Director, Jonathan Hardy, Conductor, Donald Hollier 22, 23 June

**PLAYERS THEATRE COMPANY** (30-7211)
Bondi Pavilion Theatre
New production commences early June Ring theatre for details

**269 PLAYHOUSE** (929-6804)
*An Evening with Margaret Rutherford* with Tracey Lee and the 680 Players, Director, John Howitt. Friday, Saturday & Sunday throughout June
*Belong along alonga* children's musical by Rome Warrin with 680 Players, Director, John Howitt. Saturdays throughout June

**Q THEATRE** (047 21 5735)
*The Father* by Strindberg at Penrith until June 17, Parramatta from June 20 24 and Bankstown from June 27 30

**REGENT THEATRE** (61 6967)
D'Oyly Carte Company in *The Mikado* until June 2 and *Iolanthe* until June 9 Both by Gilbert and Sullivan
*The Two Ronnies* with Ronnie Barker and Ronnie Corbett commences June 16

**RIVERINA TRUCKING COMPANY** (069 25 2052)
Old Campus Theatre, Wagga
*A Toast to Melba* by Jack Hibberd. Commences mid June

**SEYMOUR CENTRE**
York Theatre *A Manual of Trench Warfare* by Clem Gorman, State Theatre Company of SA production, Director, Colin George, with Colin Friels, Edwin Hodgeman, Patrick Frost, Wayne Jarrett and Neil Fitzpatrick Throughout June
Everest Theatre *Chris Langham* from June 4-30
Downstairs. Theatre Workshop Production of *The Cyclops* from Euripides, a puppet play for primary children Public performances June 23 and 30

**SHOPFRONT THEATRE** (588 3948)
For Young People
Free drama workshops on Sats and Suns (10-5)

including playbuilding, mime, dance, sculpture, puppetry, design, radio and video
TIE Teamshows for 1979 *The Playground Play*, touring high schools, holiday centres, work places *The Quest for the IYC* for primary schools

SPEAKEASY THEATRE RESTAURANT (662 7442)
*Four on the Floor* written by Ron Blanchard and Michael Boddy, Director, Michael Boddy, with Anne Semmler, Gordon Poole and Ron Blanchard. Until early June
*Lovely Night For It* by Doug Edwards commences early June

SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE (20588)
Opera Theatre The Australian Opera in *The Girl from the Golden West* by Puccini, conducted by Carlo Felice Cillario, produced by Robin Lovejoy, *the Abduction from the Seraglio* by Mozart conducted by Richard Bonynge, produced by George Ogilvie and *La Traviata* by Verdi conducted by Richard Bonynge produced by John Copley In repertory throughout June
Drama Theatre *The Devil's Disciple* by George Bernard Shaw Director, Doreen Warburton with Peter de Salis, Tim Elliott, Judy Farr, Bill Conn, Mary Lou Stewart, Ron Hackett, Ben Gabriel, Richard Brooks and Joe James Until June 26

THEATRE ROYAL (231 6111)
*Once A Catholic* by Mary O'Malley A Melbourne Theatre Company production, Director, Ray Lawler Until June 19
*Tribute* by Bernard Slade, Director, Peter Williams with Bobby Limb, Diana Davidson, Henry Szeps, Jacqueline Kott, Julieanne Newbould, Tom Burlinson and Anne Semler Commences June 22

*For entries contact Carole Long on 357 1200.*

## QUEENSLAND

ARTS THEATRE (36 2344)
*All For Mary* by Kay Bannerman and Harold Fletcher, Director, Margaret Brown. Until June 9
*A Man for All Seasons* by Robert Bolt Director, Ian Thomson Opens June 14

HER MAJESTY'S (221 2777)
Queensland Opera Company
*Lucia de Lammermore* by Donizetti, Producer, John Milson Designer, James Ridewood Queensland Theatre Orchestra, Conductor, Graeme Young with Phyllis Ball, Anthony Benfell Paul Neal May 30 and June 1, 5, 7, 9
*Hansel and Gretel* by Humperdinck, Producer, John Thompson, Designer, Peter Cooke, Conductor, Georg Tintner with Margaret Russell Luise Napier, Margaret Noonan June 2, 4, 6, 8
D Oyly Carte Opera Company
*HMS Pinafore* June 11 16
*The Mikado* June 18 23

QUEENSLAND ARTS COUNCIL (221 5900)
*Malambo Latino* South American Dance Company June 25 30

LA BOITE (361 1622)
*The Merry Wives of Windsor* by William Shakespeare Director, Graeme Johnston May 30 June 30

POPULAR THEATRE TROUPE
For programme ring 36 1745

QUEENSLAND ARTS COUNCIL (221 5900)
Mike McClellan and Geraldine Doyle in Concert On Tour to June 23

QUEENSLAND BALLET COMPANY
*The Nutcracker* On tour
*Malambo Latino* South American Dance Company *On tour*

QUEENSLAND THEATRE COMPANY (221 5177)
*Gone with Hardy* by David Allen, Director, John Krummel, Designer, Fiona Reilly, with Judith Fisher, Reginald Gillam, Trevor Kent June 7 30

TWELFTH NIGHT THEATRE (52 8888)
TN Company
*Happy End* by Kurt Weil and Bertolt Brecht, Director, John Milson, Designer, Mike Bridges, with Mary Hare, Harry Scott, Suzanne Roylance, and Alan Endicott To June 9
*Hancock's Last Half Hour* by Heathcote Williams, Director, Rick Billinghurst, with Errol O'Neil Underground Theatre to June 9
*Travesties* by Tom Stoppard, Director, John Milson, Designer, Mike Bridges, with Pal Thomson, Geoff Cartwright, Rod Wissler and Bruce Parr Opens June 21

*For entries contact Don Batchelor 269-3018*

## SOUTH AUSTRALIA

ARTS THEATRE
Adelaide Rep *Play It Again Sam* by Woody Allen, Director, Peter Goerecke

AUSTRALIAN DANCE THEATRE (212 2084)
*Wild Stars*. June 9 16

STATE THEATRE COMPANY (51 5151)
*Arms and the Man* by G B Shaw, Director, Nick Enright, Designer, Hugh Colman June 8 23

FESTIVAL CENTRE (51 0121)
Playhouse Hartley Drama Department
*This Old Man Comes Rolling Home* by Dorothy Hewett. June 1 24

Q THEATRE (21 5735)
89 Halifax Street
*Blithe Spirit* by Noel Coward.
Wed Sat to June 23

TROUPE AT THE RED SHED
*Bingo* by Edward Bond, Director, David Allen Thurs Sun, June 6-24

*For entries contact Edwin Relph on 223 8610*

## TASMANIA

POLYGON THEATRE COMPANY (23 6595)
*The Fantasticks*, Director, Don Gay Philip Smith Theatre, June 6 9, 13 16

SALAMANCA THEATRE COMPANY (23 5259)
*The Whale — The Biggest Thing that Ever Died* by Ken Kelso, Director, Al Butavicius In the Queen Victoria Museum and Arts Gallery in Launceston as part of a community related arts programme Touring primary and upper secondary schools with a new programme

TASMANIAN PUPPET THEATRE (23 7996)
*Kidstuff* written and directed by Peter Wilson, Music, John Shortiss. At Theatre Royal June 4 9

THEATRE ROYAL (34 6266)
SA State Opera *Secret Marriage* June 1 2
Tasmanian Puppet Theatre *Kidstuff* June 4 9
Tasmanian Ballet Company Excerpts from *Don Quixote* and new work to music of Peter Sculthorpe June 12 16
Dance Co of NSW *Poppy* by Graeme Murphy June 23 30

*For entries contact the editorial office on (049) 67 4470.*

## VICTORIA

ACTOR'S THEATRE (429 1630)
May Holiday Programme
*New Adventures of Paddington Bear*

ALEXANDER THEATRE (543 2828)
*Fiman's Rainbow* June 1, 2
MUMCO production of *Cabaret*
June 7 10, 13 16
Also Saturday Club Red Series (5 8 yr olds) *Frank in a Box* and Blue Series (8 13 yr olds) *Twice upon a Time*

ARENA THEATRE (24 9667 or 24 1937)
*Seascape* by Edward Albee Company One Designed and directed by Peter Tulloch Touring Upper Secondary Schools
*He Who Would Say 'Yes' or 'No'* based on ideas of Bertolt Brecht Devised, designed and directed by Peter Charlton Touring Lower Secondary Schools
*Winners* by Brian Friel Company Two, Designed and directed by Peter Tulloch Touring Upper Secondary Schools
*Paul Palmer and His Fight Against The Universals* by Ernie Gray, Designed and directed by Peter Charlton Touring Lower Secondary Schools
*Tindall's Quest* by Stephen Walker SCAT, Suitcase Activity Theatre — One Actor/Teacher Drama Experience
COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES
Youth Theatre Group 7 30-10 00 pm Mondays Women's Theatre Group 7 30-10 00 pm Tuesdays, Saturday Morning Classes 9 00-10 30 6 10 yrs old, 11 00 1 00 pm 11 15 yrs old.
*The Great American Back-Stage Musical* by Bill Solly and Donald Ward Mixed Company

ARTS COUNCIL OF VICTORIA (529 4355)
*As We Are*. Beverley Dunn in her one woman show Touring to major country cities
Polyglot Puppets, touring Victorian country areas
*The Elixir of Love* VSO to Ballarat, Shepparton and Taralgon
*Sounds Terrific*, Wayne Roland Brown

AUSTRALIAN PERFORMING GROUP (PRAM FACTORY) (347 7133)
Back Theatre The Astounding Optimissmos in *Paradise Depression Style* by Tim Gooding Director, Jean Pierre Mignon From mid June
*Rosmer's Home* by Henrik Ibsen, Director Jane Oehr To July 5
Also *The Young And The Jobless* Unemployment Show touring Sydney schools and community centres Poetry workshops touring Melb schools

COMIC THEATRE OF ILLUSION MUSH ROOM TROUPE (BASS 639 9111)
Programme at St Martin's Theatre, and touring to community centres

CREATIVE ARTS THEATRE (877 4056)
Community based theatre working in schools, libraries, and community centres TIE Team
*Who What Where and When?* Remedial creative drama
*Australia' That's where people stand on their heads* (to celebrate children's book week)

FLYING TRAPEZE CAFE (41 3727)
*Mercedes Bent* Continuing, to early June
New programme to be announced

THE GAY NINETIES OLD TIME MUSIC HALL (GEELONG)
Keith Reece, Tom Watson, Stephen Shelly, Rita Virgona, Michael Cant, Norma Cant, Glenys Burchfield Fridays and Saturdays only

HOOPLA THEATRE FOUNDATION (63 7643)
Downstairs Theatre *Gentlemen Only* by Eve

Merriam (continuing) *Miss Julie* by Anton Strindberg. Director, Roger Pulvers, with Julie McGregor, Terence Donovan and Maggie Millar From 29 June
Upstairs Theatre *Bertolt Brecht Leaves Los Angeles* by Roger Pulvers World Premier Music by Felix Werdler Director Malcolm Robertson From May 30

HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE (663 3211)
*Sacred Cow* Devised and starring Reg Livermore Director Peter Batey

LAST LAUGH THEATRE RESTAURANT (419 6226)
The Circus Show continuing

LA MAMA (350 4593/347 6085)
*Two Tigers* by Brian McNeil A New Zealand play about Katherine Mansfield and John Middleton Murray Director Robert Chelter To June 3
*At Home* an event with Lyndall Jones June 7 10
*Run Run Away* by Robert Kimber A new Australian play directed by John Wolf 14 June 1 July
All programmes Thursday to Sunday night inclusive Wednesdays 8 00 pm *Neo Kyma* ethnic music programme

MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY (654 4000)
Russell Street Theatre *The Club* by David Williamson Director Simon Chilvers, Designer Shaun Gatton
Atheneum Theatre *Arms and the Man* by George Bernard Shaw Director Ray Lawler Designer Anne Fraser To 23 June
*Uncle Vanya* by Anton Chekov Director Bruce Myles Designer Tanya McCallin From 26 June
Tributary Productions directed by Judith Alexander productions of new or unconventional Australian or overseas plays
Youth Work Classes directed by Stephanie Maguire
Also School Theatre Project and Curtain Up country bus to theatre programme

PILGRIM PUPPET THEATRE (818 6650)
*Peter Pan* by James Barry Adapted by Graeme Bent Two Programmes daily Monday to Friday Matinee Saturday afternoon

POLYGLOT PUPPETS (818 1512)
Multi-cultural puppet theatre with Mogg the Cat and Friends Touring schools and community centres

PRINCESS THEATRE (662 2911)
*The Triumph of Honour* Scarlatti The Australian Opera Company Conductor Richard Divall, Producer Franco Cawarra

TIKKI AND JOHN'S THEATRE LOUNGE (663 1754)
With Tikki and John Newman Myrtle Roberts Vic Gordon, and guest artists

VICTORIAN STATE OPERA (41 5061)
*La Clemenza di Tito* Mozart, from 7 July, schools programme

**MAJOR AMATEUR COMPANIES**
(please contact these theatres in the evening for further details)

| | |
|---|---|
| BASIN THEATRE GROUP | 762 1082 |
| CLAYTON THEATRE GROUP | 878 1702 |
| HEIDELBERG REP | 45 2706 |
| MALVERN THEATRE COMPANY | 211 0020 |
| PUMPKIN THEATRE | 42 8237 |
| WILLIAMSTOWN LITTLE THEATRE | 528 4267 |
| 1812 THEATRE | 796 8624 |

*For entries contact Lee Lang on 598 8658*

## WESTERN AUSTRALIA

HOLE IN THE WALL (938 3403)
*Well Hung* by Robert Lord Director Colin McColl 24 May 23 June

NATIONAL THEATRE COMPANY (325 3500)
Playhouse *Three Sisters* by Anton Chekov Director Stephen Barry 7 June 23 June

THE REGAL (381 1557)
(Interstar Co)
*Bedroom Farce* by Alan Ayckbourn Director Peter Williams From 12 June

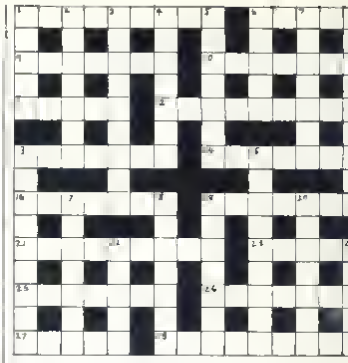
THE WA ARTS COUNCIL
Touring Programme
Lloyd Noble — Puppeteer
National Theatre TIE Team Primary and Secondary programme

THE WA BALLET COMPANY (325 3399)
The Concert Hall A Premiere Season
*KAL* based on a libretto by Elizabeth Backhouse music by Verdun Williams choreography Garth Welch
29 June 7 July

THE WA OPERA COMPANY
*The Beggars Opera* by Benjamin Britten Director Alan Abbott on country tour

*For entries contact Joan Ambrose on 299 6639*





## THESPIA'S PRIZE CROSSWORD No 12

Name

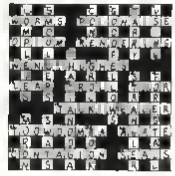
Address

**Across:**

1 Scale went awry in NSW (9)
8 Press crook softly (5)
9 Study an article trapped in jelly and become solid (7)
10 Down payment given back in the store (7)
11 Upset distressed in Yugoslavia (5)
12 Try to find the ship (9)
13 Musical ices? (7)
14 Pierce the French and make him cry (7)
16 He condemns the capacity in a consumer (7)
19 to demand shellfish belonging to us (7)
21 Marcher makes positive points (9)
23 A fit sustained during frenetic tussle (5)
25 I mingle with Cromwell and an actor (7)
26 Strange grey arm of metaphor (7)
27 Drink of unusual genus (5)
28 Put a raincoat on the governor, since he's a conductor (9)

**Down:**

1 Steals brief panties, we hear! (5)
2. Point to fisherman catching slippery character (7)
3 Train Sal and Ernest to watchfulness (9)
4 Lark set out for the benefit of conversationalists (7)
5 Dupe Ned into lunacy, and it ll all be over (5 2)
6 Hollywood director taking part in handicap race (5)
7 Funny footwear shortly available (2, 5)
8 Film maker met by darling royal at the dam (5, 4)
13 Suppress mark of cuckoldry in order to face the director (9)
15 I am present in that which is vacuous hfeless (9)
17 Moderating novice interrupts sweet nothings (7)
18 Platform from which to take beverage after a roast with vitamin deficiency (7)
19 Hearty fellow on one account (7)
20 Exhaust exterior clothing (7)
22. 'They have their and their entrances" (*As You like It*) (5)
24 These animal dwellings sound like eyesores! (5)



The first correct entry drawn on June 25th will receive one year's free subscription to *TA*

Last month's answers